

Sermons on Mark - Brian Bill

Mark 1:1 The Message of Mark

Recently I shared a very interesting article that led to some great discussion during our staff team time called, "Is Your Church a Cruise Ship or Aircraft Carrier?" You can find the post on the sermon extras tab on our website. Here are a few excerpts.

People who attend "cruise ship churches," much like cruise ship passengers, often come to be entertained and catered to by the staff. Very little is expected of these church attendees. In fact, they tend to rate the quality of their experience – the music, the sermon and the way it made them feel – much like cruise ship passengers rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their trip.

Cruise ship churches tend to be internally focused on the needs of their regularly attending members. The main goal in these churches, as on a cruise ship, is to keep the "customer" happy and the complaints to a minimum. Leaders in a cruise ship church focus on the existing members rather than pursuing those far from God or encouraging others to do so. Very little of a church's calendar, training or communication is spent on activities to reach the lost or help those in need outside the church.

There are, however, churches that are more like aircraft carriers. These churches are designed to empower all members to find their God-given purpose in life, to equip them and to send them on missions into the world to reach and serve those who don't know Jesus, much like the crew of an aircraft carrier is all about launching military planes and equipping them well to carry out successful missions.

Did you know an aircraft carrier is the same size as many cruise ships, housing thousands of people? But what distinguishes an aircraft carrier ship isn't its size; it's the efficiency on the flight deck. The crew of an aircraft carrier can launch a plane every 25 seconds—all in a fraction of the space of a typical landing strip. The mission pervades every aspect of the ship. From the pilot to the person who restocks the ship's vending machines, everyone on a carrier knows his or her particular role and how it supports the mission—to equip, prepare, launch and receive aircraft back from their crucial assignments.

An "aircraft carrier church" has a clear mission that stems from the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Everyone in the church knows why their church exists and plays a role in the mission.

I am so glad that Edgewood is an "aircraft carrier church"! Instead of meandering, you are living on mission! Instead of just living for pleasure you are focused on your God-given purpose. Instead of just cruising through life, you are committed to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

I believe Edgewood is the most generous church in the world. You tell your friends about Jesus and invite them to gather with us. You care about what the Bible says and strive to live by it, even when it is countercultural. Many of you are planning to participate in the Walk for Life this Saturday and others of you have already supported it financially. I'm hoping that we have a great turnout from Edgewood.

Just this past week, the Celebrate Recovery band played in the Labor Day parade, AWANA kicked off with a carnival on Wednesday and Second Winders and Entrusted with a Child's Heart started again on Thursday.

It's a privilege to serve on the flight deck with the people of the U.S.S. Edgewood as we live on mission by gathering, growing, giving and going with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of God!

BTW, let me be clear that I'm not saying that going on a cruise is a bad thing. I've heard that they're a blast...I just don't want our church to become one.

We're beginning a brand new series this weekend called, "The Gospel of Mark: Servant and Savior." While I've preached many sermons from the gospels, I've never preached verse-by-verse through one of them. It's going to take us some time but we'll also be taking some breaks as well. Lord willing, we'll finish chapter two at the end of November. In December we'll camp in a series that will

get us ready for Christmas and then we'll pick back up with Mark 3 in January.

Let's kick it off with the very first verse and then we'll look at some of the unique elements of Mark. Grab your Bibles and turn to Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

It's interesting that Mark starts with the launch of Jesus' formal ministry, unlike Matthew and Luke who begin with the birth narratives. The word "beginning" can refer to the cause, or head of something. Jesus is before all things as John 1:1 says: "In the beginning was the word..." Beginning can also refer to the start of something, like a road. At a deeper level, Mark is telling us that He is about to begin something brand new, much like Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning..."

"Gospel" literally means the good news that God has provided salvation for everyone through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The use of this word would have surprised his readers in at least two ways.

- For those with a Jewish background or an understanding of the Old Testament, they would have been stunned because they would have thought of a verse like Isaiah 52:7 where we read of the coming of God to a people who have been in exile: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'"
- For those from a Roman background they would associate "gospel" with some significant event that would change world history, like the birth of an heir to the Emperor. One historical inscription reads like this: "The birthday of Augustus was the beginning for the world of the 'good news' that come to men through him."

Not only was "gospel" a powerful word, it also came to be known as a literary genre. This chart [put up on screen] helps us see the different types of literature that make up the different sections of the Bible – In the Old Testament we encounter Law, History, Poetry, the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. The New Testament contains the Gospels, Church History, Letters and Prophecy.

We commonly say that there are four gospels but really, there is only one gospel of, and about, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's better to say that we have four accounts of the good news. In that sense, it's not really Mark's gospel, it's the good news of great joy about Jesus Christ. One paraphrase of verse 1 puts it like this: "The beginning of the preaching of the joyful tidings."

Mark wastes little time by getting to the identity of his subject, using three names and titles.

- His Person - "Jesus" is his given name, which in Hebrew is Yeshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation." The angel of the Lord told Joseph in Matthew 1:21: "...you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." His name is descriptive of His mission.
- His Position - "Christ" is the Greek title for Messiah, which means Anointed One. The question of Jesus' identity is the hinge point of the book. Turn to Mark 8:29: "And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'" Everything written before this confession of Christ focuses on Jesus as Servant and the verses that follow set the scene for his work as Savior. It's really the hinge of the book and the hinge of our lives. Peter confessed Jesus as Christ. Have you done that?
- His Power - "The Son of God." This bold title conveys full divine status. Look at 1:11: "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" 3:11 tells us that when demons saw Him, "... they fell down before Him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'" We also see this in the Centurion soldier's confession in Mark 15:39. If Peter's confession is the hinge point of the book, this military man's declaration is the high point: "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"

The Person of Mark

There has never been any serious question regarding the human author of this gospel. His official name was John Mark. John was his Hebrew name, which means "grace of God" and Marcus was his Roman name, which means, "the hammer." We could call him the Holy Hammer.

His mother's name was Mary and she owned a large home in Jerusalem. We don't know anything about his father. Perhaps Mark's mom was a single parent. BTW, Chris James is leading our "Single and Parenting" class that meets on Wednesday nights. A number of you are parenting solo and could really use some support and encouragement. Check the bulletin for more details.

Peter who was like a father to Mark, led him to faith in Christ, and mentored him as a man. In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter calls Mark his “son.” Although Mark was not one of the 12 disciples, he learned about the Lord through Peter. There are two highlights (or lowlights) from Mark’s life that are worth mentioning.

1. He fled from Jesus.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, Mark 14:51-52 gives us an autobiographical comment: “And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.” While Peter ended up denying Jesus, Mark ditched Him.

2. He folded on Paul.

Years later, the Apostle Paul and his cousin Barnabas took Mark on a short-term missions trip. In Acts 13:5 he’s referred to as an assistant or helper. When things got messy Mark folded and ended up going back home. This caused some conflict on the flight deck between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas gave him a second chance but Paul was not willing to do so. Later on, however, Paul chilled out and saw that God loves to redeem and restore those who fold on Him. Check out this amazing statement from Paul in 2 Timothy 4:11: “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”

Mark fled and he folded but because of God’s faithfulness, he got back up and followed Christ. I find it interesting that Mark bailed and Peter failed and yet both got back on mission. Aren’t you glad that our past failures don’t disqualify us from following Christ?

We’ve looked at the person of Mark. Now let’s consider the purpose of Mark’s account.

The Purpose of Mark

Do you ever feel angry when you consider what’s happening in our culture? Do you get afraid when you see Christianity becoming increasingly marginalized in our secular society? Something very similar but far worse was happening to first century Christ-followers. After Rome suffered a huge fire that was likely set deliberately by the emperor Nero, Christians took the blame for the flames. Persecution was unleashed and things became very precarious for believers.

It was into this setting that Mark wrote. He’s encouraging a minority group of people to live on mission just like our Master did, no matter how difficult it becomes. They needed to be reminded that even if the world seemed like it was falling apart, God would work through their witness. Likewise, we are called to live holy lives in an increasingly hostile environment. When we suffer we must remember that our Savior suffered. And when we get angry and afraid we must keep serving those around us.

Fellow shipmates, as our society continues to slide toward Sodom, following Christ will become increasingly costly, but totally worth it.

The Gospel of Mark can be read in about 90 minutes and contains poignant and declarative statements that will help each of us get recalibrated in order to live on mission.

Mark is not only the shortest and earliest gospel, it also has some very unique features that we’ll uncover together. Mark’s gospel is an ideal introduction to the Christian faith. When getting the gospel into other languages, Wycliffe Bible translators often start with Mark because of its brevity and its clear message. BTW, if you’re a newer believer, Mark is a great book to read. Let’s look now at some of the peculiar things about this gospel.

The Peculiarity of Mark

1. Mark focuses more on the works of Jesus and less on His words.

Mark records nineteen miracles, but only four parables. Interestingly, each of these parables has serving as its key theme.

2. The language Mark uses is emotive and often abrupt.

We read in 8:12 that Jesus “sighed deeply” and that He was “moved with compassion” in Mark 6:34. He “marveled at their unbelief” in Mark 6:6 and in Mark 3:5 He looked “around in anger.” At the same time, when He saw the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21 we read: “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...”

We also see that people had strong reactions to Jesus. I count over 15 individuals who decided to follow Christ when coming face-to-face with Him. People were never passive about Jesus or bored with Him. There's no way to just ignore Him. He either made people angry or astonished or amazed or in awe. People fought against Him or they put their faith in Him. The same is true today. You will reject Him or you will receive Him. There's no middle ground. Check out these 12 reactions that people had to Jesus and see if you can remain neutral.

1. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves (Mark 1:27)
2. And they were filled with great fear (Mark 4:41)
3. He ran and fell down before Him (Mark 5:6)
4. And they were overcome with amazement (Mark 5:42-43)
5. And many who heard Him were astonished (Mark 6:2)
6. And they took offense at Him (Mark 6:3)
7. For they all saw Him and were terrified...and they were utterly astounded (Mark 6:50-51)
8. The people ran about the whole region (Mark 6:54-55)
9. And they were astonished beyond measure (Mark 7:37)
10. And they were amazed...and afraid (Mark 10:32)
11. For they feared Him because, because all the crowd was astonished (Mark 11:18)
12. And they marveled at Him (Mark 12:17)

So here are some questions for you. What's your response to Jesus? Have you made the decision to follow Him? What's your reaction to what He has done for you?

3. Jesus acts quickly to meet needs.

We see this in the use of the word "immediately" or "straightway." Used 42 times, this conveys a sense of vividness and excitement! Let's just look at a few examples from chapter one (Mark 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23). The Gospel of Luke, which is much longer, only uses "immediately" seven times. We also see that 2/3 of the verses begin with "and" to communicate the speed at which the Savior ministered (notice Mark 1:29, 35, 40, 2:1). Mark has been called "a moving picture of the ministry of Jesus." Don't you love that Jesus is all about forward motion?

This week I talked to Jerry Patterson, who retired from the Navy. He helped me understand that aircraft carriers are all about "forward deployment" and "presence." He described their purpose to defend and to go forward and also be ready to help during catastrophes. We see clearly in Mark that Jesus was all about "forward deployment." How about you? Are you on mission to respond immediately to needs or is there some "mission drift" going on in your life?

4. Mark uses the historical present tense over 150 times.

In the original, instead of writing, "Jesus came" Mark wrote, "Jesus comes." Mark's all about, "Jesus says," not "Jesus said" and "Jesus heals" instead of "Jesus healed." Jesus did all those things in the past but He's still doing them in the present! He saved then and He still saves now! Tim Keller writes: "Jesus is not merely a historical figure, but a living reality, who addresses us today."

5. Mark holds up the cost of discipleship even though the disciples fall short.

In Mark 8:34 we read, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus continually calls his followers to complete commitment and when they cave, He comes alongside and urges them to get back on mission. Sometimes the disciples question and complain like in Mark 4:38: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" We have met the disciples, and they are us, right?

Here's the deal. We will never water down the message. Jesus is calling us to take up our cross, which means to go as condemned criminals to our death. Randy Alcorn writes,

"Following Christ means taking up your cross daily, which means little sacrifices made repeatedly."

But aren't you glad that Jesus gives us grace and mercy when we fall down? If God can use a denier like Peter and a deserter like Mark, He can use flawed disciples like you...and like me.

6. Mark is a missionary book.

Mark omits language that someone living in Rome would not understand. He explains Aramaic words and Jewish customs (see 7:3-4). The bottom line is that Mark is all about making the gospel message accessible to those considered "outsiders." We must do the

same because it's so easy for us to just focus on us insiders. We must remember that the church is the only organization in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members!

Churches tend to count their seating capacity. I think a better metric is to count our sending capacity. Mark's account opens with, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and closes in Mark 16:15 with, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."

7. Mark's emphasis is on the last week of Jesus' life.

The events surrounding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ make up 40% of Mark's manuscript. Someone has described Mark's gospel as "a passion-narrative with an extended introduction." Jesus was born in order to die. His death was not a tragic accident but part of God's plan from the very beginning. Jesus is our Selfless Servant and He is our Suffering Savior.

Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Mark, tells about a world-renowned scholar of classic literature, Dr. E.V. Rieu. He is known for a fantastic translation of Homer's Odyssey into modern English for Penguin Classics. An agnostic his entire life, Penguin publishers approached him at the end of his career and asked him to translate the gospels. That raised some eyebrows because people wondered how an agnostic classical scholar could translate Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When Rieu's son heard about it he had a great reaction: "It will be interesting to see what father will make of the four Gospels," then he paused, "It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels make of father." He didn't have to wonder very long - when he translated them he came face-to-face with Christ, and became a committed Christian. His story is a testimony to the transforming power of God's Word.

Let's go back to the metaphor of a church as an aircraft carrier. I also learned about life on a carrier from Erik Flaker who spent four years on one and from Abby Steele, who also served in the Navy. They both mentioned the importance of teamwork and that everyone must do their job. If a shipmate doesn't open the right valve someone could die. If orders aren't followed, planes could crash. Everyone has a job to do and must do it faithfully if the mission is to be accomplished. No one is just along for the ride or to see the sights. The key is for every member of the crew to always be ready and to maintain "high up tempo."

Mark's gospel will equip us to live on mission. Let's break out of our patterns of self-absorption and self-centered living and serve like never before so people will be drawn to the Savior.

Communion Calibration - The night before Jesus died, He gathered His shipmates for a meal and for some final mission calibration. It's likely that the Last Supper was held in the home of Mark's mom. Jesus dined with His disciples before he deployed them. It's interesting that he chose community right before he died. One again he demonstrated that He is a servant by serving His team during their last meal together and then He died as their Savior, urging them to live on mission by completing His mission. The word "commission" comes from the world of shipbuilding. A commissioned ship is one deemed ready for service. When a ship is ready to sail it is "placed into active service and sent on mission." Jesus desires for us to commune with Him right now so that we can be calibrated and commissioned to live on mission for Him. It's not about our comfort but all about our commitment to Christ. Let's use this time to get off the cruise ship and jump aboard the carrier under the command of our captain, Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Transition Prayer for Communion (deacons come down) - I draw our attention to Mark's account of this meal in 14:22-24: "And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.'" Communion Closing Song: "Jesus Paid it All"

Mark 1:2-11 I Am Second

Prayer Transition: "Bless the Lord O my soul, worship His holy name"

Last week we camped in the very first verse of Mark's manuscript and established the importance of being gospel-centric and mission-focused. We asked ourselves this question, "Are we more like a cruise ship or an aircraft carrier?" During the message I referred to our church as the U.S.S. Edgewood. That's all Jim Sheese needed to hear as his photo-shop sense took over (actually, his wife Angela first alerted him to this idea). Here's his latest creation [show pic of the crew of the U.S.S. Edgewood].

Our focus today is not on the Edgewood crew but on two individuals, John and Jesus. They were cousins and both had great birth stories, but they were certainly not equal. John MacArthur imagines the conversation that may have taken place when the moms got

together. Mary says to Elizabeth, "How's your boy? Elizabeth might respond, "Odd, really odd. You know, he's lived his whole life apart from us, he lives out in the desert. How's your boy?" To which Mary likely said, "You know, he's perfect." That's kind of a conversation stopper.

John was all about being second to the Savior and loved to point others to put their faith in Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God.

John the Baptist

We'll look first at John the Baptist (he's the first Baptist, just kidding) in Mark 1:2-8 and then we'll look at Jesus in Mark 1:9-11.

Lets read Mark 1:2-8 together: "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'"

Becca and Megan, our youngest daughters, have heard me preach a lot of sermons over the years. I recently learned that they try to guess what my alliterated outline is going to be when the message starts. When we have lunch afterwards they often tease me about it. This week I made sure to show Becca three words that begin with the same letter that come right out of our text for today...I didn't have to get creative on my own.

I underlined these words right from the passage...

- John the Preparer (Mark 1:2-3)
- John the Proclaimer (Mark 1:4-5)
- John the Preacher (Mark 1:6-8)

1. John the Preparer.

John's first job was to prepare the way for Jesus. Mark tells us in Mark 1:2 that Isaiah predicted exactly what John would do. The phrase, "It is written" is in the present tense, indicating a continuous result. What follows is a composite quotation from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3: "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

John is God's messenger, sent to come "before your face," which literally means "presence, in front of your eyes." Even though John ministered in the wilderness, he was highly visible to many people. His message was also very audible. We could translate it like this: "Lo! A voice exclaiming..."

Twice we read that he came to "prepare the way of the Lord." In ancient times when a king would travel somewhere, his advance team would go on ahead to make sure the roads were passable. Preparing the way meant to level out the roads and to reduce twists and turns. They functioned much like civil engineers, fixing highways and even constructing bridges so the king would have no delays when he came to town.

The other day I was out on a long run. As I was gasping for breath I noticed an older woman ahead of me looking at the ground. When I got closer I saw her bend down and pick up a nail from the road. She was keeping the road clear and removing something that could cause a flat tire. While I was oblivious she was keeping the way clean and clear. John the Baptist was like that. He didn't want anyone to have a blowout and have to pull over. He didn't want anything in the way of the One who is the way, the truth and the life.

The forerunner would also announce to the people that the king was coming so they better get ready to meet him. The word "wilderness" refers to the rolling badlands that made up a desolate area of barren chalky soil covered with pebbles, broken stones and rocks. What a metaphor for the barren hearts of people, like you and like me. John's job was to prepare hard-hearted people for Jesus the King.

2. John the Proclaimer.

John prepared and he also proclaimed in Mark 1:4: "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of

repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” The word “baptizing” refers to immersion. The idea is to go totally under the water, not holding anything back. At that time Jewish people would use water for purification and even had baths called mikvehs but baptism was reserved for Gentiles who converted to Judaism.

It’s interesting that these Israelites had to go out into the wilderness to be baptized. No doubt they would have been reminded of their history when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness for 40 years due to their disobedience.

There were two primary points to John’s proclamation:

- **Repentance from sin.** The word repentance means, “a change of mind that results in a change of action.” To repent means to be going in one direction and then turning around and going in a new direction. We must always proclaim repentance in our gospel presentations. Too often we present Jesus as an “app” or an “add-on” to our lives and as a result we have more fans than true followers. We need more emphasis on repentance today because too many pastors are proclaiming a watered-down Christianity with no demands and no discipleship.

We need preachers who will tell the truth about sin and righteousness and judgment so that people will repent, experience remission of sins, and be ready for the return of Christ. We must be on guard because 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

- **Remission of sin.** The word “forgiveness” means to be released, to have your sins remitted as if they had never happened. Acts 3:19 puts repentance and remission together: “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.”

I had a brief gospel conversation with an older man at McDonald’s this week. He had just finished his coffee and I told him that I get a senior discount now. He told me I looked young (I’ll take that). And then he leaned in and said, “I’ll tell you what. The older you get you’ll see that you have to pay for the sins of your youth.” I smiled and said, “That’s why Christ came so we don’t have to pay for them.” He quickly changed the subject but I was grateful for the opportunity to have a conversation about Christ and was reminded that I always need to be ready to take advantage of every opening.

Let me be clear that people were not baptized to have their sins forgiven. They were baptized because they had repented and received remission of sin. Baptism is an incredible picture of a person dying to the life of sin and rising again to a new life. Baptism always follows belief in the New Testament. If you’ve been delivered through the new birth, it’s time for you to be dunked. This weekend two seven-year-olds and one man in his 70s took the plunge. If you’re saved, it’s time for you to get immersed. Baptism is a step of obedience and a public declaration that you belong to Jesus Christ. The main idea is one of identification.

If you’d like to learn more about baptism, I encourage you to pick up a copy of the Taking the Plunge booklet. In it, I looked up every passage where baptism is mentioned and then drew some conclusions.

Mark 1:5 tells us that John was baptizing multitudes of people: “And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan.” The word “all” refers to a totality of people living in Judea and Jerusalem – that’s a lot of people! The phrase, “were going out to him,” means there was a continuous steady stream. Can you imagine walking 20 miles, the distance from Jerusalem to the Jordan, to be baptized?

The Jordan River was not a mighty river like the Mississippi or even the Rock. It was more like Duck Creek or the Green River. The Jordan is only 10 feet at its deepest and 100 feet across at it’s widest. When Beth and I were in Israel we were frankly underwhelmed by the Jordan because we were expecting it to be much bigger. We know from John 3:23 that John did his baptizing “at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there.” This is more evidence arguing for immersion because John wanted to find a place where he could totally submerge those being baptized.

The Jordan had spiritual significance to people. It was associated with deliverance because Joshua led the people across it as they headed to Wisconsin (the land of promise). People went from the Wilderness, which was associated with death and through the Jordan, which represented deliverance. One commentator estimates that as many as 300,000 people were baptized by John and his disciples over the course of many months. This is amazing because John treated the Jews like they were Gentiles, confronting them with their sins so that they would repent and experience remission. Look at the last phrase in Mark 1:5. They came: “confessing their sins.”

3. John the Preacher.

John prepared people, he proclaimed repentance and remission, and he was also a preacher. Let's look at his manner and his message.

- His manner. John was unusual in the way he looked and in what he ate. Notice his garb in verse 6: "Now John came with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist..." His clothing was as rough as his message. In the tradition of prophets like Elijah, John stepped out of the wilderness looking a bit like a wild man. We know from Luke 1:15 that he was a Nazarite, meaning that his hair and beard had never been trimmed (he probably looked like one of the guys from Duck Dynasty). Camel's hair was rough and his leather belt held it all together (BTW, Pastor Andy will be preaching about the Belt of Righteousness as part of the Armor of God on Sunday night).

His garb was certainly not fashionable and for his grub, he "ate locusts and wild honey." This is exactly what someone dwelling in the desert would eat. Bees made hives in the rocks and according to Leviticus 11:21, locusts were on God's approved menu. If you're looking for a new diet, I commend it to you because locusts provide protein and honey has the carbs that we need. I can already see a new breakfast cereal called, "Honey-nut Grasshoppers – The breakfast of prophets."

- **His message.** Verse 7 summarizes his sermon: "And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.'" John called people to repentance but the heart of his message was Jesus. Compared to Christ, he knew he was nothing.

In that culture the taking off of sandals was a job for the lowest slave. Hebrew slaves weren't allowed to do it. Roads were covered in dust and dirt and often flowed with raw sewage, thus making feet filthy. John is saying that he is lower than the lowest servant, not worthy to do even what they do. In essence, he's saying, "I am nothing; but He is everything." Listen. You will never see the worthiness of Jesus unless you first see your unworthiness. You won't be saved until you first settle the fact that you are a sinner.

This is pretty incredible because Jesus thought highly of John, saying in Luke 7:28: "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Actually, John didn't think of himself as second; he thought of himself as the littlest, the least and the last...and that's what made him great.

Mark 1:8 shows us that John understood that Christ was number one: "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." John was using water to signify life change; Jesus brings life change through the Holy Spirit. Going under water signified cleansing but people can only have their sins washed through the blood of Jesus. Water might clean the outside but only the Holy Spirit can cleanse us on the inside.

The Baptism of Jesus

Notice that Jesus comes on the scene with no fanfare or huge announcement. He simply shows up at the Jordan River to be baptized by John. This is his first appearance since he was seen in the Temple at the age of twelve. Look at verse 9: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." One commentator suggests that Jesus walked about 60 miles for His baptism.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was baptized? He certainly didn't need to repent or confess His sins, did He? In fact, in Matthew 3:14, John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus gives us the answer in verse 15:

"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus was baptized to identify with us. God the Father put our sins on Him and His righteousness was put on us according to 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus did absolutely everything that the Father required. Hebrews 2:17 says, "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

His baptism also shows His willingness to accept the mission given by His father. The Unger's Bible Dictionary points out that the Levitical law required all priests to be consecrated when they were around 30 years of age (Numbers 4:3) through a twofold process of washing and then anointing (Exodus 29:4-7). When Jesus was "washed," or baptized in the Jordan, the heavens were opened and He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. We see this in Mark 1:10: "And when he came up out of the water [this is another indication of immersion], immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove."

The Greek word which describes the heavens "being torn open" means, "to set asunder, divide, rend, split." It is used only one other time in Mark 15:38 to describe the thick curtain in the temple being torn from top to bottom when Christ died. This curtain kept people from getting close, dividing the holy place from the most holy place. Amazingly, the way is now open for us to come right into the

presence of God!

Get ready for a spiritual goose bump moment because Isaiah 64:1 contains the cry repeated over the centuries as people longed for God to come down: "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down!" Psalm 144:5 says something similar: "Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down!" Aren't you glad that Christ has come down?

And now, after 400 years of silence from above (broken first about 30 years earlier when an angel appeared to Zechariah, John's father), the heavens are ripped open after Jesus is baptized, and the Spirit "descends on him like a dove." In the writings of Judaism, the Holy Spirit is compared to a dove in the Targums, which is a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that the Jews of Jesus' time read. Tim Keller points out that Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit "hovered" over the face of the waters. The verb means, "to flutter." The rabbis translated it this way: "...the Spirit of God fluttered above the face of the waters like a dove..." Seeing the dove descend would have certainly gotten their attention because God was about to initiate a new creation!

When the heavens rip open you might expect something cataclysmic was about to happen but rather the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove. Doves are gentle birds that descend delicately and rest in their place. A dove has no talons and is loyal to its mate. Doves also mourn when death comes and feel the distress of the hurting.

When the Holy Spirit comes down we see another fulfillment of Scripture, this time from Isaiah 42:1: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."

BTW, we are prone as Baptists to not talk much about the Holy Spirit. That's to our shame because He is fully God and active today. If you want to grow in this regard one of the most helpful books I've read is *The Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* by Francis Chan. Here's an excerpt: "God put His Spirit in us so we could be known for our power. Sadly, most believers and churches are known for talent and intellect rather than supernatural power. What's worse is that we're okay with it."

Have you noticed that all three members of the Trinity are present at the baptism of Jesus? We serve one God, eternally existent in three persons. The Son physically comes up out of the water. The Holy Spirit descends visibly and the Father speaks audibly in verse 11: "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" When God speaks it's all about His Son. He's not angry or upset but instead is delighted. The Father is actually quoting Isaiah 42:1: "My chosen, in whom my soul delights."

Application

How do we apply this amazing passage to our lives? Let me offer four ways.

1. Repent and receive remission of your sins. Heaven is open to you! The way has been made straight and clear. It's time to repent and have your sins forgiven.

2. If you're a born again believer your next step is baptism Did you hear about the Georgia high school coach who is in hot water after organizing a baptism service on the football field? 18 players were baptized in a big tub before practice! He explained that a couple football players had gotten saved and then led others to Christ. They then asked him if they could get baptized and he agreed. Baptism is a step of obedience. Don't put it off any longer.

3. Consciously and continually tell yourself that you are second. The title of this sermon is "I Am Second." John settled this because he was in submission to the Savior. Are you like John in this regard? Or are you more like another guy named Diotrophes? 3 John 9: "...Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first..." Listen. Either Jesus is first, or you are. It can't be both of you.

4. Think of one person you will talk to this week in order to prepare the way for them to meet Jesus. See your conversations as ways to remove obstacles and to clear the path for people to see Jesus. Our purpose is to point people to Christ. See yourself as a messenger before Christ comes to them. You are part of the advance team. Who is that one person you will talk to this week?

I had lunch this week with Dennis Harker, the founder of the Quad Cities Missing Person Network to put together plans for our second annual memorial service to be held on Tuesday, September 29th at Lincoln Park in Rock Island at 8:30 p.m. We were talking about how to advertise the service when Dennis said something that really struck me: "This is not for our self-glorification but to spread the word so that more missing people can be found." I love his humble approach and servant-like attitude.

A couple weeks ago a young woman went missing from Moline. We got a tip that she might be in Wisconsin so I sent Facebook messages to my family members who live in Packerland and asked them to spread the word. Others did the same. A couple days later a woman saw the information on Facebook and printed off the information because the picture reminded her of someone she saw at her next-door neighbor's house. She took the picture over and sure enough, the young woman was there. She was told that her family was looking for her and she ended up being reunited with them.

Team, there are lost people everywhere. Dennis also told me that there are now 15 certified members of the Search and Rescue team in the Quad Cities. He told me that for their training they had to search some woods and find items that had been hidden there. For those who are not trained only about 25% of the items are recovered. But for those trained, over 80% are found. The key is lay the search field out in a grid and have searchers move very slowly. When they get to a certain distance they make a 360-degree turn, looking up, looking around, and also looking down. With that kind of attention they're able to find what is lost.

That got me thinking about how each of us live in a grid in the QCA. As we move slowly, turning around to look up, look around and look down, we will see the lost around us and be able to be used by God to find them. As we stay humble and care only that Christ gets the credit, we will see the lost found.

Invitation: "Here I am To Worship"

We're closing with a song called, "Here I am to Worship" on purpose because as we leave we must make the decision to worship. Worship doesn't end now...its just beginning.

And here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,

Mark 1:4-10 (et al Scriptures) Taking the Plunge

Edgewood Baptist Church August 2013

Note: I'm grateful to Ray Pritchard, John MacArthur and John Piper for their insights on this topic.

The story is told of a pastor who had just starting serving a new congregation. For eight Sundays in a row he preached about baptism. Finally, the chairman of the deacons approached him and said, "Preacher, we get the point about baptism and so I'd like to pick your text for next Sunday's sermon. Please preach on Genesis 1:1." The deacon thought that there was no way the pastor could preach on baptism from the very first verse in the Bible. The next Sunday, the pastor got up in the pulpit and read Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." He then added, "The earth is two-thirds water. Today's subject is water baptism."

Of all the issues that divide Christians, none is more hotly debated than baptism. For centuries, godly men and women have come down on different sides of this question. Entire denominations have sprung up as a result of disagreements over the mode, meaning, and purpose of baptism. I came across a book title some time ago that sums up what is far too often the case: "Baptism: The Water That Divides."

The widespread response to such controversy and confusion has been predictable: many believers refuse to enter the discussion. Clearly, the Bible does speak about baptism and those of us who accept its authority must search the Scriptures until we find satisfactory answers. There is no virtue in ambiguity when the Bible speaks with clarity.

John MacArthur observes:

"We have a largely unbaptized church which includes some of you...it's amazing how many people who proclaim Christ and confess Christ have never been baptized...there's been a sort of indifference to this very, very important matter...May I be so bold as to suggest that a failure to be obedient in the matter of baptism...is at the root of some of the immense problems in people's lives and in the church in general because it allows the church to fill up with people who are unfaithful to the simplest commands of the Lord and of His Word and that's serious."

Baptism in the Gospels

One of the best ways to study a biblical theme is by simply doing a Scriptural survey. Let's begin by looking at Mark 1:4:

"John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

Ceremonial purification and washing with water was common among the Jews.

Drop down to Mark 1:7-8:

“There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

We see here that John the Baptist was calling people to repentance from the way they had been living. God used John to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus, who would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit when they put their faith and trust in Him for salvation.

In Mark 1:9, we discover that baptism is important because Jesus Himself was baptized:

“It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”

The Unger’s Bible Dictionary points out that the Levitical law required all priests to be consecrated when they were around 30 years of age (Numbers 4:3) through a twofold process of washing and then anointing (Exodus 29:4-7). When Jesus was “washed,” or baptized in the Jordan, the heavens were opened and He was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

We see this in Mark 1:10:

“And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.”

One commentator suggests that Jesus walked about 60 miles just so John could baptize Him in the Jordan River. We also learn that the disciples were baptized and in John 4:2, they in turn baptized others. Guy Glass points out that

“Jesus **identified** with us and now Christ asks us to **identify** with Him.”

Let’s look now at Matthew 28:19-20 where we see that baptism is to be a distinctive mark of discipleship:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

Simply put, we believe in baptism, and we practice it, because Christ commanded it.

Matthew records these words as explicit instructions of Jesus before He ascended to heaven. This passage is called the Great Commission because it is the foundation for our evangelism and missionary outreach. If going is a part of the Great Commission and if making disciples is a part of the Great Commission and if teaching is a part of the Great Commission, then so is baptizing.

I like what **John Piper** writes:

“**Making disciples** is the main verb...the defining participles are **baptizing them**’ and **teaching them**.’
So...**making disciples of all nations includes baptizing them**.”

Baptism and involvement in missions are clear commands of Jesus Christ. They go together, don’t they? We obey him when we baptize and we disobey him when we don’t. Now, let’s see how this command to be baptized is fleshed out in the Book of Acts. There are ten accounts of active obedience to this ordinance in Acts alone.

Baptism in the Book of Acts

1. Acts 2:38, 41: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”
2. Acts 8:12-13: “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”
3. Acts 8:36-38: Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”
4. Acts 9:18: “Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.”
5. Acts 10:47-48: “Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a

few days.”

6. Acts 16:14-15: Referring to the conversion of Lydia, we read, “...The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.”
7. Acts 16:31-33: “So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”
8. Acts 18:8: “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”
9. Acts 19:4-5: “Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
10. Acts 22:16: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized...”

A Declaration of Dependence

One overriding truth as it relates to these verses is that baptism always takes place after belief. And, if the meaning of baptism could be boiled down to one word, that word would be identification.

In his pamphlet called, “**Water Baptism**,” **M.R. DeHaan** puts it this way:

“In the early days of the church...baptism was a declaration that the believer was definitely **identifying** himself with that group of people who were called Christians and were despised and hated. To be a Christian meant something. To **identify** yourself with those who were called Christians meant persecution, maybe death; it meant being ostracized from your family, shunned by friends. And the one act, which was the final declaration of this **identification**, was BAPTISM. As long as a man gathered with Christians, he was tolerated, but when once he submitted to baptism, he declared to all the world, I BELONG TO THIS DESPISED GROUP, and immediately he was persecuted, hated, and despised. **In baptism, therefore, the believer entered into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ.** A person might be a believer and keep it strictly a secret and thus avoid unpleasantness and suffering, but once he submitted to public baptism he had burned his bridges behind him...” (Page 27) (Bolding added)

When you are baptized you’re declaring that you’ve burned your bridges to bondage As you stand in the water waiting to be baptized, you symbolize Jesus dying on the cross. As you are lowered into the water, you’re providing a visual demonstration that Jesus was buried in the tomb. As you shoot out of the water, you’re picturing Jesus rising from the dead.

Once again, **Piper** catches the significance well:

“Baptism gets its meaning and its importance from the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who died in our place and for our sins, and from His triumph over death in the resurrection that guarantees our new and everlasting life.”

And since you personally are being baptized, you are also saying,

“I died with Jesus Christ, I was buried with Him and now I am raised with Christ to a **brand-new life**, and it’s my intent to live my life under His leadership and for His glory from this point on.”

In essence, believer’s baptism is a funeral. It’s an act of faith in which we testify, both to God and to the watching world, that the person we used to be is dead and buried, and that we’ve been raised to new life as 2 Corinthians 5:17 states: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Baptism Illustrated

Two illustrations will help us understand the concept of identification.

The first is the Pledge of Allegiance. When a person pledges allegiance to the flag, he or she is openly identifying with the United States of America. Likewise, when a person is baptized, he or she is pledging allegiance to Jesus Christ by openly identifying with Him.

The second illustration is the wedding ring. When a man (or woman) gets married, he (or she) almost always begins to wear a wedding ring or a wedding band. The wedding ring does not make someone married because some people choose to not wear a ring and yet they are still legally and truly married. But, if a person does not wear a wedding ring, you can generally assume that he

or she is not married. In a similar way, if a person in New Testament times was not baptized it was assumed that he or she was not a believer. The ring represents the solemn commitment of a man and a woman to become husband and wife. It is a public testimony to that commitment. A wedding ring **identifies** a wife with her husband and a husband with his wife. **It is a public symbol of a private commitment.** Just as the ring *declares*,

"I'm taken. I belong to another,"

In baptism the believer declares,

"I'm taken. I'm a believer and I belong to none other than the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords."

Having said all that, baptism is much more than just a symbol of salvation.

Piper reminds us that there are two ways of symbolizing something. If we write the word "love" on a blackboard for a group of 2nd graders and tell them that this word represents an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person, that's one kind of symbolism. But when I took Beth out on a pier on a starry night in Wisconsin almost 30 years ago, and nervously stuttered and sputtered as I asked her to marry me, giving her a diamond ring as a sign of my love, that was something much different than simply writing out the letters L-O-V-E.

When I gave her the ring, **I was expressing my love through a symbolic action. In a similar way, baptism is a sweet symbol of our faith and it's an expression of love and a commitment to live under the Lord's leadership for the rest of our life.**

Mode of Baptism

Throughout Christian history three primary modes of baptism have been followed: sprinkling, pouring and immersion. The Greek word translated "baptize" is the verb baptizo. According to contemporary lexicons, the primary meaning is "to dip, plunge, or immerse." The secondary meaning is to "bring under the influence." The root means "to totally overwhelm." Interestingly, while there were Greek words for sprinkling or pouring that were available to the authors of Scripture, they consistently chose the word **baptizo**, or immersion, to describe the mode of baptism.

A brief survey of the how of baptism in the New Testament reveals the following fascinating facts:

Baptism requires water. John the Baptist said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance..." (Matthew 3:11).

Baptism requires plenty of water. It's interesting that John baptized at a certain spot in the Jordan River where it was not shallow. Check out John 3:23: "Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized." After the Ethiopian ruler came to faith in Christ, he stopped his chariot, and said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36).

Baptism requires going down into the water. After the chariot stopped, the Bible says that Philip and the man "went down into the water and Philip baptized him" (Acts 8:38).

Baptism requires coming up out of the water. This man went down into the water, and then came back up out of the water (Acts 8:39). Jesus did the same when He was baptized (Matthew 3:16).

Clearly, immersion is in view here. In addition, the figures of speech used by the Apostle Paul are consistent with immersion.

Baptism is called a "burial" in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12.

Baptism is **"into his death"** and involves being **"raised to walk in newness of life."** It is difficult to see how sprinkling or pouring could convey these meanings.

So, what does all this mean? As far as we know, in the New Testament, water baptism was always by immersion and that's why we practice baptism by immersion at Edgewood.

Questions About Infant Baptism

Of all the questions related to baptism, there's one that raises a lot of confusion. Here it is: What About Infant Baptism? If it's OK for babies to be baptized, then our entire understanding of baptism will reflect that fact. The same is true if only believers are to be baptized. There really is no middle ground between these positions. Let me make two points.

First, faith is always the prerequisite for baptism.

Note again, the order of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go...make disciples...baptize them." It doesn't say, "Go...baptize...make disciples." In the Bible, **belief** always precedes **baptism**. In fact, baptism has no meaning without faith in Christ

because it's the personal belief of the one being baptized that gives baptism its meaning. Without the ingredient of faith, baptism becomes just another church ritual. Someone put it this way:

"Unless you have already come to faith in Jesus, being baptized does no more than get you wet."

Second, there are no cases of infant baptism in the New Testament.

That comes as a surprise to many people, but it is absolutely true. In his book on Systematic Theology, Millard Erickson writes:

"The only people whom the New Testament specifically identifies by name as having been baptized were adults at the time of their baptism" ("Christian Theology," page 1097).

I would add that there is not a single case of baby baptism recorded anywhere in the Bible.

Let me briefly address three arguments that are made in favor of infant baptism.

1. It is sometimes suggested that when Christ blessed the little children and said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 19:14), He by inference sanctioned the principles upon which infant baptism rests.

When Christ blessed the little children, he invited them to come to Him, not to a baptismal service – in fact, there's no mention of water anywhere. There is no doubt that Jesus welcomes children. In fact, He honors and loves children much more than we do, but there is a big difference between blessing and baptizing.

2. Some people believe that there must have been infants in the several cases of household baptisms in the book of Acts.

In the case of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15), we don't know if she was even married. In the case of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31-34), the text goes to great length to stress that all heard the word (Acts 16:32), all were baptized (Acts 16:33), and all believed in God (Acts 16:34) - factors which would seem to expressly rule out infants.

3. Others believe that infant baptism in the New Testament takes the place of circumcision in the Old Testament.

The Bible nowhere suggests that baptism replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant. More importantly, the Lord's Supper, not baptism, is expressly stated to be the sign of the New Covenant Christ made with His own blood in Luke 22:20.

The most tragic fact about infant baptism is that it leads many people to think they are Christians when in reality they are not. Multitudes go through life supposing that a few drops of water sprinkled on them as a baby suffice to establish their relationship with God. Sadly, some reject a personal relationship with Jesus Christ because they think their infant baptism paved the way to heaven. I've heard some people say, "I'm good to go. I've been baptized."

I can remember a Christian guy asking me if I was saved when I was in high school. I told him very bluntly: "Of course I am." He said, "How do you know?" To which I replied, "Because I was baptized as a baby." I used to think that this was all it took. I had been led astray, just like millions of other people who have false assurance of their salvation just because they were dabbed with some water when they were a week or so old.

The most important issue is your relationship to Jesus Christ, not whether or not you were baptized as a baby. The fact remains that the practice of infant baptism has actually led many people away from personal, life-changing faith in Jesus Christ.

Answers to Other Questions About Baptism

1. How important is baptism?

If you are not yet a believer, don't get hung up on baptism. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ first, and then be baptized. If you're already a believer, don't argue with someone who is not saved yet about baptism. Instead, do whatever you can to help them become a Christian. Paul had this focus in 1 Corinthians 1:17: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel..."

2. When should baptism be performed?

As soon as possible after conversion. In fact, in the book of Acts, it often happened immediately after someone got saved. Baptism was one of the first things a new believer took care of. There's no reason to put it off. If you haven't been baptized, then you need to do it and the sooner the better. **Remember, baptism is not a mark of spiritual maturity, but rather a statement of personal identification with Jesus Christ. You don't have to wait until your spiritual life is where you want it to be. It's an obedience issue, not a maturity issue.**

Perhaps you're wondering if it's too late to be baptized. Maybe you've been putting it off because it's too scary to even think about. Maybe you haven't been convinced. Over the years I've had the privilege of baptizing individuals who were brand new Christians

and some who have been believers for most of their life. Please let us know if you're ready to take the plunge. We can make arrangements to have you baptized at one of our weekend services.

3. If I was baptized as an infant do I need to be baptized again as a believer?

Yes. Remember the biblical order: belief first, baptism second. Baptism is an active part of discipleship and a response of obedience to what God has said. The problem with infant baptism is that it reverses the natural order by putting baptism first, then (years later) belief in Jesus Christ. For that reason, many people who were baptized as infants later decide to be baptized again as believers. Since baptism is a public statement of your own personal faith in Jesus Christ, then it's important to make your statement as a believer. Actually, you're not really being baptized again because, in my view, when you were sprinkled as a baby it wasn't biblical baptism. When you follow the Lord as a believer into the waters of baptism, it will be your first baptism.

4. How old should children be before they are baptized?

They should be old enough to make an intelligent profession of faith in Christ. Children raised in a Christian home may come to such a profession much earlier than other children. Some young children will truly understand the gospel and the meaning of baptism; others will need to wait a few years. In any case, Christian parents, in consultation with a deacon or pastor, should be the ones making the final decision. As a general guideline, some children are ready to be baptized when they are 7 or 8 years old. Make sure your child is old enough to not only understand but to remember it for the rest of their life.

5. How can I prepare my children for baptism?

There are several key things you can do that will make a difference with your children.

Take time to explain the gospel to them. As parents we are the primary teachers and shepherds of the flock that meets in our home. Sit down and carefully explain the meaning and purpose of baptism and do whatever you can to mark this major step in your child's life so that they never forget it. Make sure your children attend Sunday School, AWANA, Elevate and other ministries of the church that evangelize and equip children and teenagers. These ministries are designed to partner with parents in the evangelizing and discipling of children. Do not pressure them into making a decision, but help them to definitely trust Christ when they are ready. Make sure they observe a baptism service. You might even want to make sure your kids are with you the next time we have a baptism. Ask a pastor to explain to your children what baptism is all about. The week they are to be baptized, have a family talk about the importance of what they're about to do. Invite your child's friends and relatives to be present for the baptism service. Make it a festive celebration and an occasion to remember for years to come.

6. What actually happens at a baptismal service?

The service includes these elements: The pastor and the person to be baptized stand in the water facing the congregation. The person to be baptized is asked to affirm his or her faith in Jesus Christ and desire to be baptized. The pastor will then say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and then you will be immersed. After coming up out of the water, the congregation will burst into joyful celebration. The actual act of baptism (including the questions) may take only a few minutes.

7. Should I invite my friends and family to my baptism?

Absolutely! Nothing could be more appropriate. Remember, baptism is a public sign of what has happened on the inside. It is also a visual re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Your baptism is your opportunity to preach a sermon without saying a single word. So, yes, by all means invite everyone you know to attend your baptism. Make it a festive, joyous occasion and pray that God will use your witness to influence your friends for Christ.

When the early Christians declared their faith in baptism, they would shout out, "Jesus is Lord!" Baptism has always been a sign of submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

William Barker tells of a machinist at Ford Motor Company in Detroit many years ago who became a Christian and was baptized. Shortly after he got saved, the Holy Spirit convicted him of his need to make restitution for some car parts and tools he had stolen from the company before he had become a Christian. The next morning he brought everything back to his employer, explaining how he had just been baptized and wanted to make things right. His boss was dumbfounded so he sent a cable to Mr. Ford, who was out of the country, asking him how he should handle the situation. Mr. Ford sent an immediate reply: "Make a dam in the Detroit River, and baptize the entire city!"

Are you serious about following Christ? Then demonstrate your discipleship and get ready to take the plunge! If you believe and have been born again it's time to be baptized. Talk with a pastor, call the church office.

Mark 1:12-20

Gospel-Centered Living

Song: "Holy Spirit"

Holy Spirit, you are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere
Your glory God is what our hearts long for
To be overcome by Your Presence Lord

I sensed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our services this past weekend. Four people committed to live on mission by joining Edgewood (two more are joining this weekend). Three people were baptized and eight others have expressed interest in getting baptized.

Last Sunday afternoon Jason Crosby (one of our deacons) and I met with the leadership team of Ignite, our Singles Ministry. We were really impressed with their depth and desire to gather, grow, give and go with the gospel. The Holy Spirit flooded our meeting as we shared ideas for a mission statement. Here are a few excerpts...

*Enjoying God, growing in Christ, being mission-minded, fellowship, being singles-oriented, and being culturally relevant.

* The vision of Ignite is to reach, equip and empower singles (young and old) to reach their full potential in Christ; to the glory of God...

* To equip and encourage college students and young professionals to gather, grow, give and go.

* To unleash young adults to live on mission in order to reach more young adults on campuses and in careers.

Last Sunday night I had the joy of speaking at the Celebrate Recovery service at the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center in Davenport. Gary Pickering leads this service every week. We gave out copies of Anchor for the Soul to the 45 men who attended. Two of the guys said, "I've already read this book and it helped me a lot." I was curious so I asked them where they picked up a copy. Both of them said it was when they were in jail. This made me smile because Larry McClean, one of our members, leads a service at the jail twice a week and hands out these gospel books.

After the message an invitation was given and the Holy Spirit led 5 guys to respond! I was able to talk to two of them afterwards and emphasized the importance of repentance and following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly.

After an incredible day of watching God do his work, I woke up with a headache on Monday, which nearly became a migraine. Sunday was amazing but I felt awful on Monday.

This past Wednesday, students in the QCA and other cities gathered around their flagpoles to pray for their campuses, their community and our country [show pics]. My guess is that some students paid a price this week for standing up for the Savior. The prayers around the pole may have been followed by problems in the lunchroom and locker room.

And this weekend is the Junior High Retreat. Thanks to Pastor Ed's outstanding job of recruiting, around 30 sponsors and students are there right now! I spoke Saturday morning on the importance of finding faithful friends and avoiding fatal friends and then concluded by challenging them to make sure they were following Jesus Christ as their forever friend. I also mentioned that when they come down from the high of the retreat, it's likely they will come face-to-face with trials and temptations.

Our ladies also had a retreat this weekend and the principle is the same. Those who went will no doubt go from a time of refreshment back into the ruts of life. The car show just happened and a number of people came, but someone's brakes may have gone out on the way home.

Actually, whenever you experience a spiritual high, you need to get ready for a spiritual low. As we continue in our series from the Gospel According to Mark our focus today is on "Gospel-Centered Living." Last weekend we looked at John the Baptist's garb and his grub. I mentioned the possibility of a new breakfast cereal based on his diet of locusts and wild honey and sure enough, Jim Sheese wanted me to know that this cereal is now available on grocery store shelves [show pic].

We observed that all three members of the Trinity were present when Jesus was baptized and the Spirit descended like a dove. This all crescendos when the Father exclaims from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

You would think that after this incredible coronation Jesus would experience an easy inauguration to his ministry. It would have been cool if the angels had broken out into the Hallelujah chorus (like the Captivating Keyboard guys played for Second Winders). Think again. Here's the big idea for today: It's costly to follow Christ, but the price is worth paying. When we sign up to follow the Savior we will encounter severe suffering. We'll see this in three vignettes from the life of Jesus found in Mark 1:12-20.

1. Terrible Temptation
2. Real Repentance
3. Demanding Discipleship

1 - Terrible Temptation

Look what happens right after the baptism of Jesus in verses 12-13: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."

Let's draw some principles from this terrible temptation.

1. Temptation often comes right after a significant spiritual experience.

Notice the word "immediately," which is one of Mark's favorite words. There is no lag time between the triumph and the temptation. Listen. You are never more vulnerable than when you're coming out of a great victory.

Elijah experienced this. He saw the fire of God consume the sacrifice on the top of Mount Carmel. 450 prophets of Baal are put to death. He prayed and it rained for the first time in three and a half years. He outran the chariot of King Ahab. Everything's going great. Less than 24 hours later, he runs away from Jezebel, he becomes depressed and asks God to let him die. He went from the mountain of victory to the valley of mourning.

2. The Holy Spirit sends us into trials so we can learn to stand up to temptation.

It's interesting to me that "the Spirit immediately drove him out..." The phrase "drove him out" is quite vivid and forceful. It means that he was "driven urgently and cast into." Literally it means, "to throw out of by strong compulsion." This same word is used of Jesus "casting out demons" in Mark 1:34, 39 and of Him driving out the moneychangers from the temple in Matthew 21:12.

I experienced the Holy Spirit's urgent urging on Thursday morning when I was out for a run. As I was jogging by the Islamic Center in Moline, I saw a Muslim man standing next to the building. Without breaking stride I found myself changing direction and heading straight towards him. His eyes got big as I got close (it may have been my odor from all the sweat). I put my hand out and introduced myself and told him that I felt badly about the more than 700 Muslims who were killed while on their Hajj pilgrimage near Mecca this week. Interestingly, they were involved in a ritual called, "Stoning the Devil." I also expressed my condolences for the families of 29 Muslims who were murdered in a mosque in Yemen this week.

I could tell he was stunned...and so was I because I hadn't planned on saying any of that. I told him I was a pastor and he wanted to know where. When I mentioned Edgewood it seemed like he had heard about us because he smiled. I told him that I was praying for him and that I've met his Imam. I pray for them early every Sunday morning when I'm running. I'm hoping for further opportunities to go with the gospel to them. Muslims are lost and need Jesus Christ. And those who die without being saved by the Savior are lost forever. That should bother us.

We need to clarify that God doesn't lead us into temptation but He does put us in trials so that we can be strengthened spiritually. James 1:13 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." Satan and his demons tempt us to sin while God urges us to overcome and not give in to the temptation. He provides a way of escape for us so that we don't sin. We see this in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

3. Times of temptation and trial can last a long time.

Look at the first part of Mark 1:13: "And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan..." The wilderness was a place of danger, doom, death and the abode of demons. No one wanted to even go through there, much less be there for 40 days. The number 40 is associated with testing and preparation. Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness and Moses spent 40 years in training. The spies spent 40 days in Canaan and the Israelites heard Goliath curse God for 40 days before David grabbed a slingshot.

I don't know if your temptation will last four minutes or four days or 40 days or 40 years but it will probably last much longer than you want it to.

4. Sometimes we are called to suffer in isolation.

Notice the middle part of Mark 1:13: "And he was with the wild animals..." This proves that Jesus hung out with junior highers, because it says he was with the wild animals. JK. Actually, I loved spending time with teenagers this weekend. Interestingly, it would have encouraged Christians in Rome to know Jesus was with the wild animals because they were being fed to the lions.

5. God will give us what we need to tackle temptation.

Even when you feel isolated, you are never alone. Notice how Mark 1:13 ends, "and the angels were ministering to Him." The word "minister" is the word from which we get deacon and means to "wait upon, to serve." It's the idea of serving food, which was what Jesus needed at the end of these 40 days.

I find it interesting that Mark does not give us greater detail about this terrible temptation of Christ. It's all because his purpose is to show that Jesus was on mission as servant and Savior. If you want to read more about how tough it was, check out Matthew 4 and Luke 4. Let me just point out that when Satan tempted Jesus three times (there were more than three I'm sure), each time Jesus responded by quoting a verse from the Book of Deuteronomy. One of the best ways to tackle temptation is to quote Scripture.

It's costly to follow Christ, but the price is worth paying. We see that first in terrible temptation and second, in real repentance.

2 - Real Repentance

Both John and Jesus preached a message of real repentance. Look at Mark 1:14-15 where we read Jesus' first words recorded in Mark: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"

John the Baptist continued preaching for about six months and during this time he called King Herod out for adultery. John did not compromise truth and didn't water down the message even when speaking to someone in authority. As a result, he was arrested and thrown in jail. A year later, Herod had John beheaded (we'll learn more about this when we get to Mark 6).

After John was arrested, it's interesting that "Jesus came into Galilee," which was the district of Herod. Jesus didn't shy away from confrontation either as he moved into the danger zone. This reminds me of my time as a house fellow (R.A.) at the University of Wisconsin. I was saved during my second year at Madison and then served as a house fellow for two years. At the beginning of my last year, I arrived before the other residents and decided to put a Bible verse up on my door. When I came back from class it was crossed out and its place was a quote from Karl Marx: "Religion is the opiate of the masses." I remember thinking, "Game on." God had put me in that exact spot for his purposes. I built bridges with my Marxist friend and had many opportunities to have gospel conversations with him.

It's "go" time for Jesus. I should point out that Mark skips over more than a year of Jesus' ministry in the southern area known as Judea. You can read more about what happened in the Gospel of John – the cleansing of the Temple in chapter two, Nicodemus coming to him at night in chapter 3 and then, as he makes his way north to Galilee, the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Let's pull out some principles from this passage.

1. The gospel we proclaim comes from God Himself.

When Jesus came into Galilee, we read that he came, "proclaiming the gospel of God." The word, "proclaim" means to "herald loudly." And "gospel" refers to "good news." Please notice that this is not a pep talk or a homily or a self-help discussion. Jesus is proclaiming the gospel "of God." Unfortunately, gospel preaching is becoming increasingly rare today.

The "gospel" was in the news this past week when the Pope visited our country. Unfortunately, according to reports I heard on Wednesday, the "gospel" was associated with income inequality and climate change. If the Pope had wanted to talk about social and moral issues, I wish he had used his platform to make stronger statements about the sanctity of life and the persecuted church (Pastor Saeed Abedini is being tasered and tortured in a prison in Iran where he has been held for almost three years). I wish he had declared that marriage is between one man and one woman for life (I should add that maybe he did and I just didn't hear it). He did have lunch with the homeless instead of eating with Congress though!

While I respect the person who is the Pope, the papacy itself is unbiblical. The issues that led to the Reformation remain the same today. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. I read the text of the Pope's address to the joint session of congress and then watched a replay of it Thursday night.

I was grieved that while he mentioned Moses and Abraham Lincoln, he never mentioned the name of Jesus Christ even once. What was missing was the "gospel of God" because the real gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died as our substitute on the cross. His blood paid the price for our sins, and then He rose from the dead on the third day. Christ calls us now to

repent and receive Him into our lives. That's the real gospel of God.

Rich Mullins once wrote: "I have attended church regularly since I was less than a week old. I've listened to sermons about virtue, sermons against vice. I have heard about money, time management, tithing, abstinence, and generosity. I've listened to thousands of sermons. But I could count on one hand the number of sermons that were a simple proclamation of the gospel of Christ." The Apostle Paul settled this in his ministry as we see in 1 Corinthians 2:2-5: For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

2. God's timing is always perfect.

The time was now "fulfilled" for Jesus to launch into his ministry. Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son..." The idea is that something is complete and fully developed, like ripe fruit ready to be picked or like corn and beans ready to be harvested by farmers. The expression is also used of a pregnant woman feeling labor pains, as she gets ready to deliver her baby. The stage was perfectly set for the Savior to do His work.

Jesus operated according to the Father's timetable as He lived with an acute awareness of divine timing. Speaking to his earthly mother in John 2:4, Jesus said, "My time has not yet come." Responding to His brothers' sense of timing in John 7:8, Jesus said: "For my time has not yet fully come." That time fully came when He died on the cross as we read in Romans 5:6: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

3. The kingdom of God is close.

Jesus came to let people know that the kingdom of God is "at hand," which means it is near and the summons is urgent. The basic idea is that God is active now and is ruling and reigning in human hearts. Don't you long for that right now? I've been grieved to see almost every day for the past week headlines that read, "Shots fired in the QCA." We need the kingdom of Christ to reign in our community! In Luke 17:21 in the KJV, Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is within you." It is invisible now but will be visible later when God establishes His eternal kingdom. I wonder if some of you are close but not in the kingdom yet. Jesus said to a scribe in Mark 12:34: "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

4. The gospel calls people to turn from their sins and to trust the Savior.

The message is clear and concise and compelling: "Repent and believe in the gospel." We learned last week that John preached repentance as well. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action. We must repent and receive. It's not enough to just try to turn over a new leaf. Nor is it enough to just receive without repenting. They go together. Have you turned from your sins and trusted in Christ's finished work on your behalf?

It's costly to follow Christ, but the price is worth paying. Temptations are terrible and repentance must be real. That leads to the final truth: Discipleship is demanding.

3 - Demanding Discipleship

Jesus now calls four of his disciples and makes some strong demands on them.

Let's look at Mark 1:16-18: "Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

As Jesus walks on the shore he sees two brothers fishing. They weren't using poles but were "casting a net into the sea." [show pic]

Let's break down what happens next.

• Follow.

Jesus said to them, "Follow me." While students often followed rabbis, it was unusual for a rabbi to actually call someone to follow him. I love how Jesus calls us to follow Him. We spend time with him, walking where he walks, watching and listening to what He does, so that we become like Him. Jesus said in Luke 6:40: "But everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."

• Fish.

Jesus calls us to follow and then he gives us our mission: "And I will make you become fishers of men." Notice that this is not something that will come easy because Jesus has to "make us become fishers of men." It's important to understand what may have

been going through their minds when they heard these words. According to Jeremiah 16:16-18 and Ezekiel 29:4, when God refers to himself as the “fisher of men,” He’s referring to coming judgment. They would have sensed the urgency of calling people to radical repentance since God was about to call people to judgment.

• **Forsake.**

Notice how quickly they decide to become disciples: “And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” The word “left” literally means that they “severed all their ties.” Jesus was worth more than anything they may have walked away from. It’s helpful to know that this is not the first time they had encountered Jesus. They were present when Jesus was baptized and heard John the Baptist say in John 1:36: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” In John 1:41 we read that Andrew said to Simon: “We have found the Messiah.” They had put their faith in Christ months earlier and now they left their lives behind to fully follow the Lord. Jesus said something similar in Luke 14:33: “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

In Mark 1:19-20 Jesus calls two more brothers to follow Him: “And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”

In both cases, these guys forsake what they had to follow Christ, with James and John leaving a family business to help mend broken lives. Discipleship is disruptive. Jesus is to have priority over family, finances, friends, and our future. Everything else must become second to the Savior. The call of Jesus is both personal and public. Jesus calls each of them and all four follow in order to fish and they forsake everything in order to do so. To say it another way, once they are saved they are now ready to surrender and to serve.

Tyler Maas shared a quote this week that is quite powerful, “Jesus only asks us to give up one thing to follow him...and that’s everything.” Pastor Steven Lawson says, “You cannot be nominally committed to Christ.”

Another pastor has said that if you’re 95% committed to Christ, you’re still 5% short. What specifically is holding you back from complete commitment?

The great evangelist Henry Ironside was interrupted one time by the shouts of an atheist. The atheist yelled, “There is no God! Jesus is a myth!” and finally, “I challenge you to a debate!”

Ironside responded, “I accept your challenge, sir! But on one condition. When you come, bring with you ten men and women whose lives have been changed for the better by the message of atheism. Bring former prostitutes and criminals whose lives have been changed, who are now moral and responsible individuals. Bring outcasts who had no hope and have them tell us how becoming atheists has lifted them out of the pit!”

“And sir,” Ironside concluded, “if you can find ten such men and woman, I will be happy to debate you. And when I come, I will gladly bring with me two hundred men and women from this very city whose lives have been transformed in just those ways by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ!”

Jesus Christ changes lives and He does so as we go through terrible temptations, real repentance and demanding discipleship. Remember this: It’s costly to follow Christ, but the price is worth paying.

Jesus is calling you personally right now...by name. I see three applications to this message.

1. Get saved by repenting and receiving Jesus Christ.
2. Surrender and fully follow Christ.
3. Serve whoever, wherever and whenever.

Jesus is passing by right now. What will you do? Are you ready to follow? Will you forsake your own life so you can fish for people’s souls?

It comes down to your will. Will you say, as a matter of your will, “I will follow Christ, paying the price because He’s worth it?”

Closing Song: “I Will Follow”

Where you go, I’ll go
Where you stay, I’ll stay
When you move, I’ll move
I will follow you

Mark 1:21-28

Power Encounters

A recent article in the New York Times entitled, “Googling for God,” begins this way: “It has been a bad decade for God, at least so far.” Google searches for churches are down 15 percent over the last five years compared to the previous five years. Pornography searches are up 83 percent. Google searches for heroin are up 32 percent. Searches questioning God’s existence are up. The top Google search including the word “God” is “God of War,” a video game. If you’d like to read more check out the link on the “Sermon Extras” tab on our website.

Instead of focusing on Google web searches, we’re going to search God’s Word today. We’re going to discover that a response is expected when Jesus is encountered. Please turn in your Bibles to Mark 1:21-28 as we see what happened when the Savior showed up in a worship service. I can’t wait to see what will happen when Jesus shows up in our service today. How will you respond?

Last week we looked at the terrible temptation Jesus went through, we reflected on what real repentance is all about and we ended by wrestling with the demands of discipleship as Jesus calls us to forsake all and follow Him. And now we read in Mark 1:21: “And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.”

Even though Jesus was from Nazareth, the majority of His ministry was done in “Capernaum,” which was located on the northwest edge of the Sea of Galilee. This city was a hub of trade and traffic.

We’ve pointed out previously that Mark depicts Jesus as moving rapidly from place to place and from person to person to help us see Him as Servant and Savior. In doing so, he skips over other ministry events. During the weeks that Mark does not mention, Jesus ministers in Nazareth, calls the others disciples, and delivers the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. According to Luke 4:16-30, after Jesus preaches in the synagogue in Nazareth, the people try to kill Him so He moves his ministry headquarters to Capernaum.

Jesus wasted no time as He “immediately on the Sabbath” entered the “synagogue.” The synagogue was a gathering place and was started when there were ten families. The synagogue system goes back to the time of the Babylonian captivity. Since they couldn’t go to the Temple to worship, they started gathering in synagogues, which quickly became the center of every Jewish community. They were similar to local churches. The Talmud says that there were 500 in Jerusalem and because Capernaum was a good sized-city, it’s likely that there were several synagogues there.

By the way, if Jesus deemed it important to gather for weekly worship, then shouldn’t we as well? Luke 4:16 says that it was His “custom to go.” That’s why our very first “G” is to “Gather with God’s people.” Hebrews 10:25 tells us to not forsake our gathering together.

And we read that Jesus was “teaching.” It was common for visiting rabbis to speak in the synagogue so it wouldn’t have been unusual for Jesus to be invited to preach there. It was also common for the speaker to sit while he was teaching. The service contained elements similar to ours – prayer, praise, proclamation of Scripture and preaching.

We’ve praised and now let’s proclaim this passage as we read it together. When we’re done I’m going to pray and then we’ll move into the preaching.

Let’s stand and read Mark 1:22-28 in unison: “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.”

Pray.

Since a response is expected when Jesus is encountered, let’s look at four different responses.

1. People astonished.

Check out Mark 1:22: “And they were astonished at his teaching...” The word “astonished” means “to be at a loss, to be knocked out of one’s senses.” The idea is to be “stricken as by a blow, to be dumbfounded.” In our culture, we might say, “their minds were blown by his teaching.” This was a common response when people encountered Christ.

- Mark 6:2 – “...many who heard him were astonished...”
- Mark 7:37 – “And they were astonished beyond measure...”
- Mark 10:26 – “And they were exceedingly astonished...”

We see why the people were astonished: “for He taught as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” A bit of background is helpful here. When the scribes taught, they had no inherent authority and so they ended up just quoting other rabbis. When Jesus preached He did so with personal power and intrinsic authority. The word “authority” means the “power or right to enforce obedience.” Listen to these words found at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:28-29: “...The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

BTW, that’s why we preach and teach the Bible at Edgewood. We are not just giving our opinions or trying to come up with clever insights. We unashamedly and unreservedly preach the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God so that lives change and in the process God gets all the glory. Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The scribes were known for rote recitation. They were dull and dry and dusty and would drone on and on, much like Charlie Brown’s teacher (Wah wah wah, Wah wah wah, Wah wah wah). Can you imagine a preacher being boring? Don’t answer that.

Here’s the deal. A response is expected when Jesus is encountered.

2. Demons afraid.

The religious people responded with astonishment at Jesus’ authority but now we see that a demon has his cover blown when Christ shows up: “And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit...” Do you find it unnerving that an unclean spirit or demon, is present in a worship service? Don’t be. Demons love to hang out among ritualistic and religious people. In Revelation 2:9, Jesus refers to the synagogue in Smyrna as the “synagogue of Satan.”

The synagogue had ritualistic services without rebirth. They had rules without relationship. They had sermons without the Holy Spirit. They sang music without a sense of God’s majesty. Demons aren’t bothered by dusty and dry services but when Jesus shows up, they go crazy.

I’ll never forget the images described in *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti. In one scene he describes a demon trying to get into a church: “It had arms and it had legs, but it seemed to move without them, crossing the street and mounting the front steps of the church. Its leering, bulbous eyes reflected the stark blue light of the full moon with their own jaundiced glow. The gnarled head protruded from hunched shoulders, and wisps of rancid red breath seethed in labored hisses through rows of jagged fangs. It either laughed or it coughed-the wheezes puffing out from deep within its throat could have been either...It moved toward the front door. The hand passed through the door like a spear through liquid; the body hobbled forward and penetrated the door, but only halfway...”

Notice what happens next in our text from Mark: “And he cried out...” The word here means to cry out in agony, like a death roar: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” Unclean spirits are normally undercover but when Jesus shows up, they reveal themselves. This is a sad commentary on the spiritual climate of the synagogue. A demonized man is in the service and no one notices until Jesus starts speaking.

The unclean spirit is literally saying, “You have no business with us...yet.” When he declares that Jesus is from Nazareth, he’s recognizing his humanity but is also using this title as a term of derision. Nathaniel says in John 1:46: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Being from Wisconsin, I grew up wondering if anything good could come from Michigan.

“Have you come to destroy us?” Notice he uses the pronoun “us” as if there’s more than one or perhaps he’s speaking for all of them. They know their destruction is coming. This is very similar to what the demons say in Matthew 8:29: “And behold, they cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?’”

The demon begins by dissing Jesus and now he declares the deity of Jesus Christ by saying, “I know who you are – the Holy One of God.” It’s interesting that demons know exactly who Christ is. In Mark 3:11 we read this, “And whenever the unclean spirits saw him,

they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'" In Mark 5:7, a demon confesses that Jesus is "the Son of the Most High God."

It's important to note that declaring a name was considered a way to secure mastery over someone. That explains why Jesus immediately told demons to be quiet. He also didn't want any testimony from a demon as we see in verse 34: "And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." Jesus doesn't need a demon to be his marketing manager. We see this in verse 25: "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'" Jesus muzzled the demon and wouldn't let him say another word. And then He commanded the unclean spirit to come out.

Demons have no choice but to obey Christ. Please don't ever put Jesus and Satan on the same level. Satan and his evil demons are powerless before Jesus Christ. They not only know who He is but also know that He has all authority and power. We see this in verse 26: "And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him." Utter evil cowers in the presence of utter holiness.

This unclean spirit makes a racket before he comes out.

- Convulses the man. The word "convulsing" means, "to tear and lacerate, to throw into spasms." I'm sure this woke anyone up who was snoozing in the service!
- Cries out with a loud voice. This loud voice means to "screech." These were deeply-felt screams of someone suffering. The word for "loud" is "megas," which refers to something big and mighty. This reminds me of James 2:19, which says that the demons believe and "shudder." The demons scream because they know they're eventually headed to the Lake of Fire.

Jesus uses no formula or incantation. He speaks the word and the demon cries out and then comes out! This is proof of the coming judgment and shows that Jesus came into the world to defeat and destroy the devil and all his unclean underlings. 1 John 3:8: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

Unfortunately, 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers. 1 John 5:19 says that that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." The devil and his demons hate Christ and they hate Christians. How else do you explain why the shooter at that Community College in Oregon targeted Christians on Thursday? In John 8:44, Jesus refers to Satan himself as a murderer. I agree that we should not name the shooter so we don't give him any glory but I will name the one who was behind the murders – his name is Satan, our adversary, who is ultimately responsible for the taking of all innocent life.

Allow me to pick back up from Peretti's book...

"Suddenly, as if colliding with a speeding wall, the creature was knocked backward and into a raging tumble down the steps, the glowing red breath tracing a corkscrew trail through the air. With an eerie cry of rage and indignation, it gathered itself up off the sidewalk and stared at the strange door that would not let it pass through. Then the membranes on its back began to billow, enfolding great bodies of air, and it flew with a roar headlong at the door, through the door, into the foyer-and into a cloud of white-hot light. The creature screamed and covered its eyes, then felt itself being grabbed by a huge, powerful vise of a hand. In an instant it was hurling through space like a rag doll, outside again, forcefully ousted.

"The wings hummed in a blur as it banked sharply in a flying turn and headed for the door again, red vapors chugging in dashes and streaks from its nostrils, its talons bared and poised for attack, a ghostly siren of a scream rising in its throat. Like an arrow through a target, like a bullet through a board, it streaked through the door. And instantly felt its insides tearing loose.

There was an explosion of suffocating vapor, one final scream, and the flailing of withering arms and legs. Then there was nothing at all except the ebbing stench of sulfur.

"Then the first sound was added to the picture: a soft, muffled sobbing from the end of the right pew. There, kneeling in earnest prayer, his head resting on the hard wooden bench, and his hands clenched with fervency, was a young man, very young...It all showed in his countenance, now the very picture of pain, grief, and love. His lips moved without sound as names, petitions, and praises poured forth with passion and tears."

There is no more dangerous place to be than where the Word of God is preached with authority and people are praying. All of hell is alarmed when dead religion wakes up. Demons scream and those in bondage are set free. And Satan doesn't like it at all.

A response is expected when Jesus is encountered.

3. People amazed.

After this power encounter with the unclean spirit, we read in verse 27: “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’” To be amazed means to “wonder with great admiration.” It also has the idea of being alarmed, panicked or rendered motionless. They started questioning each other, wondering who this could be. His preaching had power. His message had might behind it. People were being set free from sin and Satan, right in front of their eyes! This was no ordinary synagogue service once the Savior showed up.

They had no category for Christ. What He was saying and doing had never happened before. If Jesus can quiet and cast out a demon, He can calm you and free you from any bondage you are under today. He conquers everything. Nothing is too hard for him. Jesus didn’t come to just manage your sin but to master it. This man was delivered from a demon. Jesus is still doing the same today.

I was helped this week by something John MacArthur said about this passage: “The people didn’t know who He was, the demons did...the demons knew they had reason to be afraid...when sinners come to a true understanding of the authority of Christ as the Son of God, they are also terrified...the [demons]were terrified and could not be saved. The people were amazed and would not be saved...the amazed people and the terrified demons end up in the same hell.”

Demons know more about the power and authority of Christ than many of us do...you might get His titles right but do you submit to His authority? Jesus doesn’t want your amazement; He wants your allegiance. If you have never put your trust in Jesus Christ you should be terrified!

4. Gospel advanced.

Notice what happens in Mark 1:28 as the final result of this power encounter: “And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.” The fame of Jesus spread without the Internet or without texting. No one had to Google Jesus because people were telling their neighbors and those neighbors told others about Him. His name spread in the marketplace. It went to all places because those who saw what He did could not stop talking about it.

Everyone we know deserves to know what we know about Jesus. I like what Charles Spurgeon said: “If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”

One night a church caught on fire and was burning to the ground. As the pastor watched it burn, he noticed a man standing next to him watching with great interest. He recognized the man because he had invited him to church and so he asked him a question, “I’ve invited you to come to services many times, but you never came. Why are you here tonight?” The man replied, “Well, I’ve never seen this church on fire before!”

Action Steps

1. Stay away from the occult.

Don’t mess around with Ouija boards, witchcraft, astrology or the horoscope.

2. Don’t give ground to Satan.

Ephesians 4:27 urges us to not give Satan a foothold in our lives. Some of you are living with unconfessed sin. Live a pure life and don’t have sex outside of biblical marriage. Don’t do drugs or abuse alcohol. Why open yourself up to demonic influences? Have you been compromising or deliberately disobeying in any area of your life? If so, it’s time to repent and confess.

3. Put on your spiritual armor at all times.

Our Sunday night series is on the Armor of God. Pastor Tim is preaching this week on what we should wear on our feet from Ephesians 6:15: “And, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”

4. Make Jesus famous by putting Him first in your life.

Our lips and our lives must match up. Our words and our works must make the fame of Jesus’ name spread everywhere throughout the Quad Cities area and to the ends of the earth. Is your fervent faith making Jesus famous?

I was thrilled that so many Junior Highers invited their friends to camp last weekend. You can make Jesus famous by having a block party in your neighborhood – one brand new family at EBC had a block party last month and I just heard that a long-time EBC couple is planning one for this month. Make Jesus famous by standing up for life. Speak up for Christ. Do your job with integrity. Take Christ to campus with you.

5. Get saved.

Today. Right now. It's possible to be astonished and amazed and still not repent and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and follow Him as the absolute authority in your life. It's easy to be wowed and yet not worship Him with how you live. The only one who correctly identifies Jesus in this account is the demon.

A response is expected when Jesus is encountered. What's it going to take for you to be saved? If you are not saved, the Bible says you belong to Satan. You are either in the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of light, the kingdom of the Son or the kingdom of Satan. But at salvation, you can be transferred from the domain of demons to the rule of God. Acts 26:18 describes what Jesus does: "to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins."

While we still don't know all the details about the shooting at the Community College in Oregon, one survivor reported, "He started asking people one by one what their religion was. 'Are you a Christian,' he would ask them, 'and if you're a Christian stand up' and they would stand up and then he said, 'Good, because you're a Christian you are going to see God in just about one second.' And then he shot and killed them."

What would you do in that setting? Would you stand up and identify yourself as a Christ-follower or would you stay on the floor? Would I? In order to help us settle that right now, I'm going to ask you to stand if you're ready for the very first time to not just be astonished or amazed at Jesus but to actually align yourself with Him. Anyone ready to do that? If you've already settled your salvation, would you also stand for Christ right now?

Let's declare that our God is greater and stronger and higher and awesome in power.

Invitation: Our God is Greater

Our God is greater

Our God is stronger

God You are higher than any other

Our God is healer

Awesome in power our God our God

Benediction

Here's what I think. When we're on fire for God, people won't have to Google God. They will know all about Him when you spread the fame of His glorious name. Those in that synagogue service left and couldn't stop talking about Jesus. Let's do the same right now as we leave this service. Make him famous by living out your faith!

Mark 1:29-34 Healing the Hurting

Have you noticed how many mother-in-law jokes are out there? Mothers-in-law have been the brunt of jokes since the beginning of time, well maybe not because Adam and Eve didn't have any in-laws. When I did a Google search on mother-in-law humor, over 43 million results came up! Some sites are devoted exclusively to this unique relationship.

I don't tell these kinds of jokes because I've been blessed with an extremely loving, humble and caring mother-in-law. Her sweet spirit has been stamped on Beth and all four of our daughters.

A couple mothers-in-law come to mind in the Bible. Ruth had such a close relationship with Naomi that she ended up embracing her faith and we'll see today that the disciple named Peter cared so much for his wife's mother that he brought Jesus to her.

Here's the big idea for today: When you bring Jesus to your home, your home will become headquarters for ministry.

We saw last week that astonishing things happen when Jesus shows up in a service. Our main point was this: A response is expected when Jesus is encountered. We ended with the challenge to make Jesus famous by how we live and by what comes out of our lips. How have you done with this?

In our study of the Gospel according to Mark, we've noted how Jesus establishes his authority as the Son of God. Mark 1:1 says,

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark moves quickly from event to event in the first chapter to prove that Jesus is who He says He is.

- John the Baptist testifies that his job was to prepare the way for the Lord in Mark 1:2-3 in fulfillment of the prophecies found in Isaiah and Malachi.
- At His baptism in Mark 1:9-11, the heavens are torn open, the Holy Spirit descends visibly and the Father declares verbally, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”
- Jesus then conquers some terrible temptations from Satan, preaches real repentance and proclaims demanding discipleship in Mark 1:12-20.
- He then goes to a synagogue service and shows His power over a demon by quieting him and casting him out in Mark 1:21-28. We learned that Jesus doesn’t want our amazement; He wants our allegiance.
- In our passage today we’ll see the power of Christ displayed over physical diseases in Mark 1:29-34.

All of this is overwhelming evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

Bring Jesus Home

Let’s take our big idea today in two parts. The first half goes like this: When you bring Jesus to your home... We see this in verses 29-31: “And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

1. The setting.

Look at Mark 1:29: “And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” After the synagogue service everyone headed to Village Inn, only they didn’t have one. It was common for this service to end at noon and then people would gather in homes for Sabbath lunch. The scene now moves from a public power encounter in the synagogue to a very private event in a home.

We know from John 1:44 that Simon and Andrew were originally from Bethsaida. It’s likely that Peter had purchased this home in Capernaum because that’s where they had moved their fishing business. Note that Peter still had a house and that he used his home for hospitality. He fully followed Christ and yet as a follower he was to care for his family and use His home for God’s glory and to make Jesus famous.

Archaeological excavations have uncovered a home in Capernaum that is near the site where the synagogue stood. Beth and I have been to this house. Ancient writings have been discovered on the walls with the words “Lord” and “Christ” in Aramaic, Greek, Syriac and Latin. They’ve also found first century fish hooks and graffiti references to “Peter.” Tradition says that this house was only about 100 yards from the synagogue.

When Peter left everything to follow Christ that meant that he gave everything to Christ. Too often we categorize the spiritual and the secular. We put worship and prayer and Bible study into the spiritual pile and things like work and hobbies and relationships and family into the secular pile. Listen. When you repent and receive Christ, when you forsake all to follow Christ, it means that everything becomes spiritual – your family, your house, your possessions, your finances, your job, your hobbies, your relationships, your schoolwork, your activities, because everything matters to Jesus.

Peter’s priorities had changed when he met Jesus – the people in his life and all of his possessions now belonged to Jesus. He could still enjoy them, but he had transferred ownership of everything to Him. Have you made this same transfer?

2. The sickness.

We’re told in verse 30 that Peter had a mother-in-law. That probably blows some of your minds because you’ve been taught that Peter was never married. That’s something the Catholic Church advocates and since they believe Peter was the first pope, they restrict popes and priests from marrying. 1 Corinthians 9:5 clearly states that Peter had a wife: “Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter. We see this in John 1:42 when Jesus says, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). If you’d like to dive deeper into this, see Galatians 2:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:5.

It’s clear that Peter was married and that he cared for his mother-in-law: “Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever...” The idea

in Greek is a bit stronger than that she was just lying down with a fever. The sense is that this fever had so affected her that she was thrown into a sickbed without any hope of ever getting better.

The phrase “lay ill,” means that she was flat on her back. The word “fever” refers to “a fire in the bones.” Because of the kinds of diseases that were prevalent in that marshy area around the Sea of Galilee at the time, it’s possible that she had malaria or typhoid fever. In the Gospel According to Luke, we read that she had a mega, or “great fever.” This is not surprising that Luke would give us this diagnosis since he was a physician. It was common back then to categorize fevers as “small” or “great” so this tells us that she was in a life-threatening situation. It’s important to know that in the ancient world “fever” was a disease itself, not just a symptom. Plus, they had no Advil or Tylenol or cheese curds to comfort the one who was sick.

Are you aware that as part of our discipleship we’re called to care for our families? This is clearly stated in 1 Timothy 5:8: “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

“...and immediately they told him about her.” I love how they told the Lord about the problem. In essence, they were interceding on her behalf. They didn’t know what else to do or who else to go to. A crisis does that, doesn’t it? Even pagans will pray if the problem is big enough.

3. The Savior.

We see what Jesus does in verse 31: “And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her...”

- He came. Don’t you love that Christ comes close to us in our time of need? Luke tells us that he came and “stood over her.” He didn’t stay at a distance but came near. Our greatest need when we’re hurting is to experience His presence. I love Psalm 34:18: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and is attentive to their cry.”
- He touched. Jesus could have snapped his fingers or just said a word but instead He took her by the hand. Jesus did the same with the blind man in Mark 8:23: “He took the blind man by the hand.” There’s power in touch, isn’t there? It was a big deal for Jesus to touch her because according to the Talmud (a Jewish commentary on the Old Testament), touching anyone with a fever would have rendered one unclean. But with Jesus, the touch did not defile the healer, but healed the defiled! When Jesus touches someone, everything changes!
- He lifted. I love that Jesus lifted her up. He came down so He could lift her up. She couldn’t get up on her own. Listen to 1 Samuel 2:8: “He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap.”
- Fever left. We have every indication that the fever left immediately, which was amazing in itself. It was common in that culture to use elaborate incantations that would take a long time and then they still wouldn’t work. Some so-called faith healers on TV hawk holy handkerchiefs or urge listeners to send in \$1,000 seed money for a miracle. Not so with Jesus. Christ came, He took her by the hand, and then He lifted her up and the fever left.

This is a big deal because Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would have a healing ministry in Isaiah 35:5-6: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” Matthew 8:17 tells us that Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.’” This shows how caring and compassionate Christ is. He feels every fever. He carries every cancer. He bears our brokenness and He takes our transgressions.

4. The serving.

The end of Mark 1:31 implies that she served them immediately: “and she began to serve them.” Have you ever recovered quickly after a fever? It generally takes some recuperation time, doesn’t it? Your bones ache, you feel weak and all you want to do is sleep. Especially for us men. Have you heard about the “Man Flu”? It’s an illness that causes the male to be helpless and sicker than any other family member. I’m told that in females it’s called a cold.

But for Peter’s mother-in-law she was completely helpless and sicker than any other family member. And yet, there was no recovery time. She didn’t get better gradually. She was healed and went right into helper mode.

Anytime you encounter Jesus the natural response is to serve Him! This word for “serve” is the word we get “deacon” from. It literally means to “wait on tables” and was also used of the angels ministering to Jesus at the end of His terrible temptation in the wilderness

in Mark 1:13. I love serving with our deacon servants [put up pic]. Along with the trustees, these leaders serve because the Savior has saved them.

Peter's mother-in-law made her life immediately available to Jesus and His ministry. We have been saved to serve, healed to help and touched so that we touch others. By the way, the female followers of Jesus seemed to understand the necessity of serving more quickly than the guys got it. Mark 15:41 says that a number of women "followed him and ministered to Him." Luke 8:2-3 tells us that many women provided for Jesus and his disciples out of their financial means.

When you bring Jesus to your home, your home will become headquarters for ministry.

Make Your Home Headquarters for Ministry

Let's look now at the second half of our main idea from Mark 1:32-34: "That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him."

The reason they waited until sundown was because they were prohibited from carrying anyone on the Sabbath, because that would have been considered work. Sabbath started at sundown on Friday and ended at sundown on Saturday. Actually, they had to wait until the first three stars were clearly visible in the sky.

I imagine it like a countdown clock before the start of a big event like the Cubs/Cards series. Everyone was eagerly awaiting the setting of the sun so they could bring battered people to Jesus. This makes me think of Malachi 4:2. When the sun sets "The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."

The people who came had all sorts of problems. Some were suffering from sickness and others were sabotaged by evil spirits. Some were diseased and others were demon possessed. Broken legs and broken hearts gathered outside the home. Some couldn't walk so they were carried. Verse 32 says they were "brought," which means, "to carry as a burden."

The people who came had "various diseases," which means manifold, or a wide variety. Remember this: Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. The older I get the more convinced I am that everyone is suffering – emotionally, mentally, physically or spiritually...or all the above.

According to Mark 1:28 the fame of Jesus' name spread throughout the region when Jesus cast out a demon and now that He has brought physical healing to Peter's mother-in-law, crowds line up to see Him. In Mark 1:33 we read that the "whole city" was gathered at the door of the house. The tense of the verb suggests that the crowds continued to come. People knew that Jesus was not only at Peter's home but that He could help those who were hurting.

Can you imagine this scene as people pounded on Peter's door? I wonder what it would look like if people gathered on our front lawns because we brought Jesus home with us from the service today? Here's the deal: When Christ shows up, the crowds will be curious.

Mark 1:34 says that He "healed many." What this means is that He doesn't heal everyone in this life. In this world there will be woes and challenges and disease and cancer and fevers. And while we should pray for healing, we must realize that sometimes His will is to not heal.

Jesus silenced the demons because He didn't want their testimony: "And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him." It's interesting that the demons wanted to declare who Jesus was but were not permitted to do so. Jesus wants us to speak about Him, but many of us walk around muzzled.

Before we assume that all these people were putting their faith in Jesus, it must be pointed out that many just wanted a miracle. They wanted relief from pain and affliction but weren't ready to repent and receive salvation. While Jesus healed many who were sick and cast out demons, He came for a different purpose, as we will see next weekend. He extended mercy but He was also on mission. He was merciful and missional.

I love the progression here that corresponds with our 4Gs. We're to gather with God's people to worship and then bring Jesus home with us so that we grow in our faith. We then give to others by serving and finally we go with the gospel to our neighbors and to the nations.

Action Steps

Let's allow this passage to percolate in our lives. Here are some action steps.

1. Don't allow your in-laws to become out-laws Is there anything you need to do to reconcile this relationship?

2. Live out your faith wherever you are. Are you helping your children learn about Jesus? Are you taking Jesus to your workplace? Have you invited Him into your hobbies, your sports, and other activities? Do you take him to your campus with you?

3. Ask the Healer to bring healing to you and others. Sometimes Jesus heals miraculously. Other times he does it through doctors and medicine and surgeries. And sometimes we won't receive healing until we're in heaven. Let's not be like Asa, who neglected to ask for healing in 2 Chronicles 16:12: "Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians."

4. Find somewhere to serve. The question should never be whether you will serve. The real question is where and when will you serve? We have not been lifted up only to lie back down. You can help us achieve our mission by serving in the Nursery, Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, Celebrate Recovery, going on the mission trip to Puerto Rico, Pregnancy Resources or World Relief or someplace else in the community. The possibilities are endless because the needs are unending. If you're saved, settle this truth: you're a servant.

5. Repurpose your home as headquarters for ministry. Practice hospitality. Reach out to your neighbors. What one event can you plan within the next three months to use your home as a place for people to learn about God's grace? What about a fall bonfire or a Cookie Exchange in December?

6. Ask the Savior to save you. We all have a sickness called sin and Satan is out to destroy us. Our fever is fatal and there's no way we can help ourselves. We've fallen and we can't get up. Ask Jesus to come and He'll come. And He'll touch you and then lift you up. Repent and receive Him into your life and then follow Him wholeheartedly. He died in your place, taking your punishment, His blood paying the price for all your sins. And then He rose from the dead on the third day, showing His power over sin, sickness and Satan!

Closing Song: "Healer"

You're my healer
You're all I need

Mark 1:35-39

Praying and Preaching

Introduction. Hold up a clear jar and say, "This jar represents our day." [Pour sand into jar to depict the various things we fill our days with – eating, work, school, watching TV, time on Facebook, hanging with friends, sports, reading, etc.] When full put rocks on top.

Here's our summary statement for the sermon today: Prioritize a place for prayer and preach in all places. We're walking through the Gospel According to Mark. Grab your Bibles and turn to Mark 1:35-39. Let's stand and read this passage together: "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.' And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."

I see four fundamentals of faith demonstrated in the life of Jesus that you and I can apply to our lives.

1. Start your day with prayer.

As we learned last weekend, Jesus had a very busy Saturday. He cast out an unclean spirit during a worship service in the morning and in the afternoon, he healed Peter's mother-in-law. At night, the whole city gathered in front of Peter's house and Jesus healed many who were sick and cast out many demons. I imagine that He was exhausted and it would have made perfect sense for Him to sleep in.

But that's not what happened according to verse 35: "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed." In the gospels we see Jesus praying some 25 times.

We see three things about Jesus' prayer life from this passage.

- **It was planned.** The phrase "very early" means, "exceedingly early." The time reference that Mark uses places this time of prayer during the fourth watch of the night, which was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. There's precedent for early morning prayers in many other passages of Scripture. Psalm 5:3 says, "O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice." Psalm 119:147: "I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words." Isaiah 50:4-5 says, "Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught." When we pray early we get our marching orders for our day.
- **It was private.** Notice that Jesus found a private place to pray. The word "desolate" is the same word used for the wilderness and means, "lonely and deserted." Luke 5:16 says, "But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray." Do you have a private place for prayer? Jesus encourages us to find one in Matthew 6:6: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Have you seen the War Room yet? The main point of the movie is that we're called to do battle in prayer and that we should find a private place to do that.
- **It was prolonged.** The tense of the phrase, "and there he prayed" means that He "continued in prayer." Luke 6:12 tells us that at times Jesus would pray all night long. This axiom is helpful: "Little prayer, little blessing. Some prayer, some blessing. Much prayer, much blessing."

Have you heard the expression, "Don't just sit there, do something?" Some of us need to hear that because we're just sitting around. But most of us need to hear a twist on this phrase, "Don't just do something, sit there." BTW, one of our ABF classes has started a prayer time on Tuesday nights at 6:00 p.m. here in our facility and they'd love to have you join them.

Listen. Since the Lord Jesus Christ needed to pray, how much more do we? In John 5:19 Jesus declared His dependence on the Father, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord..." Here's a truth that has helped me over the years: "Prayer is not about getting my will done in Heaven, but about getting God's will done on earth."

Perhaps you think you're too busy to pray. To borrow the title of a very helpful book, you're too busy to not pray! D.L. Moody once said, "We ought to see the face of God every morning before we see the face of man." If he were alive today, he might add, "We ought to see the face of God before we see Facebook." Here's a challenge. Before checking your Facebook feed, put your face in God's book.

Early African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in private devotions. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others. They would kindly remind the negligent one, "Brother, the grass grows on your path." Is grass growing on your path? Start your day with prayer.

2. Stamp your life with faithfulness, not popularity.

Peter and his peers sense that Jesus has become a sensation so they panic when they find out that He had left the house. Look at verse 36: "And Simon and those who were with him searched for him." The word for "search" is the idea of "pursuing earnestly as when hunting."

Luke 4:42 says they "sought Him...and would have kept Him from leaving them." The idea is that they think Jesus is making a big mistake and that it's their job to bring him back to all the people who find him popular. It's like they were snapping "selfies" with the Savior and wanted to show Him off some more. We see this in verse 37: "and they found Him and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for you.'" They're amped up and even annoyed. They can't understand why Jesus would be hiding out when everyone wanted Him to help them out.

When I started my senior year in high school I made a decision that by the time I graduated, that everyone would like me. I wanted to be popular. When I was with the athletes, I talked sports. When I was with the burnouts (that's what we called those who partied back then), I did what they did. The only group I struggled to connect with was the "brainiacs," because my grades weren't all that good. At the end of my senior year I remember thinking that as far as I knew, everyone liked me. While that sounds good, I had compromised in many ways such that I no longer knew who I was. I had put popularity above character.

We live in a culture like that, don't we? We admire the popular people simply because they are popular. We celebrate the famous because they're famous. The disciples liked that Jesus was admired. But Jesus didn't care about being popular with people because He focused on faithfulness. Phillip Keller writes this about Jesus, "He was more interested in the quality of the people's response to

Him than in the quantity of the crowd.”

I don't really want Edgewood to be a hip and popular church. I long for us to be a Holy Spirit empowered church. We don't crave fame; we want to be faithful. In fact, by preaching the Word of God without compromise we won't be popular but instead will be persecuted. When people hear about Edgewood, I don't want them to say we're a “good church,” I want them to say we're a “gospel church.”

What about you? Are you trying to fit in with people or are you being faithful? Would you rather be popular than persevere in your faith? Will you stay committed or will you compromise when our culture comes at you? Will you bail or will you believe? Start your day with prayer. Stamp your life with faithfulness, not popularity.

3. Strategize to reach other places.

Don't you love how Jesus says and does things that totally strip their gears? They're expecting Christ to come back to Capernaum because it's the largest city in the area and there are many who want to see Him. Check out verse 38: “And He said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.’” Some of these towns were quite tiny and did not have the same importance as Capernaum. And yet, to Jesus, they were extremely important.

How many of you grew up in a small town or out in the country? I did too. How many of you live in a small town right now? If you're not sure, I came across a test this week called, “You know you live in a small town when...”

- It has an aquarium...stocked with live minnows.
- For fun on Saturday nights, people drive up and down Main Street.
- The only traffic jams are caused when a farmer drives down Main Street in his combine.
- The local phone book has only one yellow page.
- You don't use turn signals because everyone knows where you're going anyway.
- The New Year's baby was born in October.

If you don't live in one of the 4 big cities that make up the Quad Cities, do you ever feel left out or somehow inferior? I want to give props to some of these towns...you can cheer wildly if you hail from one of these hamlets.

Blue Grass Buffalo Eldridge LeClaire Long Grove Walcott Roscoe Aledo Andalusia Cambridge Carbon
Cliff Coal Valley Colona Cleveland East Moline Erie Geneseo Hampton Illinois City Lynn
Center Matherville Milan Orion Port Byron Preemption Reynolds Sherrard Silvis Taylor Ridge Alexis Alpha New
Windsor Viola Green Bay, Wisconsin (that slipped in there somehow)

If I missed your town, can you shout it out?

Jesus cares for every community because He loves every life. I get a kick out of how Pastor Ed welcomes guests to Second Winders. When a guest says he's from Coal Valley, Ed says, “That's my favorite town!” When the next guest says she's from Colona, Ed says, “That's my favorite town.” Listen. Wherever you live is Jesus's favorite place because He loves you!

Capernaum has heard and now Jesus takes the gospel to other places. Jesus strategically moves to other towns and cities, and He wants us to do the same. This reminds me of what Oswald Smith wrote: “No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once.” The Apostle Paul communicates this passion for other people when he writes to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 10:16: “So that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.”

I love that Jesus said, “Let us go...” Isn't it cool that you and I are invited to join Him on mission? He does the work but His does His work through us. Our mission is to preach in all places and to reach all peoples. We're to prioritize a place for prayer and preach in all places. To Jesus, this is not optional. His purpose in coming was to take the good news everywhere: “for that is why I came out.” Luke 4:43 captures this with even stronger words: “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”

One way we can get the message of the gospel out is by getting behind a new initiative by Pregnancy Resources to raise funds for a mobile ultrasound unit that will travel to smaller towns around the QCA. Offering free pregnancy tests and free ultrasounds, this van will be strategically positioned to help women who are in crisis, without them having to travel to one of the centers in Davenport or Moline.

That's also why we partner with 90 missionaries and ministries strategically positioned all over the globe. It's part of the mission that Christ has given to His church in Matthew 28:16-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." It's called the Great "Co-Mission" because we are called to make disciples in partnership with Him. Sunday night we have the privilege of hearing from Ruth King, our missionary to Japan. Phil and Pattie Eager, our missionaries to Mexico, will be interviewed on Sunday night, November 8th. If you want to learn more about our missionaries, check out the e-media screen in the lobby.

Missionaries to Burkina Faso, and former Edgewood interns, Mike and Pam Hillhouse, will be here next weekend for our Missions Festival. Our theme is "Glorious." Mike posted some exciting news this past week about what God is doing in Burkina: "The church in Somgande had 11 children saved in their VBS!! The church in Tanghin had 258 kids present and 27 accepted Christ as their Savior!! Among those present were the children of the ringleader of the Muslim squatters who gave us such a hard time on our land!!!!"

God is at work around the globe! For example, I just heard that 238 AWANA clubs have started up in Pakistan in the last three months!

That's why we invest so much into our children and youth and young adults at Edgewood. We're called to reach the next generation with the gospel. We'll be having a special business meeting on Sunday, November 8th after the evening service to give an update on our next steps for our youth and young adults ministry. God is really working in this area! The Ignite Singles ministry will be doing yard work for a widow next Saturday and the high schoolers have a retreat next month and Wintertainment in December. On Wednesday night, I attended a Fellowship of Christian Athletes rally in Silvis where one of our high schoolers, Mason Laud, a sophomore at UT, did a great job sharing his testimony. Last Sunday morning there were 30 high schoolers in the ABF class and 25 came to a bonfire last Sunday night.

Jesus calls us to prioritize a place for prayer and to preach in all places.

On a personal level, that's why I write a column for the Dispatch/Argus and serve as the chaplain for the Quad Cities Missing Person Network. That's why we post our sermons online and share baptism videos on Facebook. We're determined to take advantage of every opportunity possible to get the gospel out in as many places as possible to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. The Apostle Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel..."

Here's what we've learned so far. First, start your day with prayer. Second, stamp your life with faithfulness, not popularity. Third, strategize to reach other places. That leads to the final fundamental of faith.

4. Stand on gospel preaching.

Wherever Jesus went, He was committed to preach the gospel. While He performed miracles, according to verse 39, the main reason He came was to get the message of the good news out: "And He went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons." It's likely that this preaching tour lasted weeks and maybe even months.

The message is more important than miracles. Those in the first century were shallow, self-centered and focused on the sensational and they were interested in Jesus only when He could do something for them. Sounds similar to our society today, doesn't it?

The message of the good news matters more than anything else. Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

It's the preaching of the gospel that saves people according to 1 Corinthians 1:21: "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."

I heard a sad story this week that the Church of England is considering only opening their churches on Easter and Christmas because they have lost so many members. The church buildings are quickly becoming museums because they stopped preaching the message of the gospel years ago.

Albert Mohler adds his perceptive insight,

"It has to do with the inevitable results of the secularization of a society and of a church losing its distinctive theological identity, more specifically, losing its grasp of the gospel." One bishop, referring to a major report about the future of the 16,000 Anglican places of worship in England suggests these buildings be preserved

because they are “an unparalleled part of our country’s heritage.” I like how Mohler responds to this: “If buildings...are supposedly most valuable because they remind us merely of heritage, then that’s not going to last...It has to be a living faith in which it is understood that nothing less than life and death for eternity are at stake...A community heritage may explain why buildings are preserved, but a commitment to heritage alone will never keep a church alive. Museums are about heritage. Churches are about living faith and living witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

While God has given Edgewood some beautiful buildings, and the trustees and custodial team do a fantastic job maintaining them, what brings life to Edgewood is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ! We stand on gospel preaching because Jesus did. That’s why we focus on expository preaching where the main point of the passage is the main point of the sermon. 2 Timothy 4:2 says, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

On Tuesday night, Beth and I, along with three other couples, were invited to join Jason and Suzie Crosby’s Life Group to take part in a panel discussion about faith and family matters. It was a blast being with these young couples and to see how God is at work in each of them. If you’re not in a Life Group or part of a Sunday morning Adult Bible Fellowship, can I encourage you to join one?

After we finished, Beth and I started talking to a young couple that is new to Edgewood and brand new in the Life Group. While Beth was talking to the woman, she found out that she just got saved on September 17th after hearing the gospel presented during Entrusted with a Child’s Heart. Beth was overjoyed and thrilled to hear this.

The husband and I were listening at this point and then I turned to him and asked if he had ever been saved. He answered and said, “No, I haven’t.” I then explained the gospel to him and asked if he understood it. He said, “Yes.” I proceeded to ask him if he was ready to get saved and he said he was. I was led to ask if he wanted to do it right then and there and he said, “Sure.” While everyone else was eating dessert and talking in the kitchen and living room, he bowed his head, repented and asked Jesus to save him from his sins.

When he was finished I called everyone over and asked the wife to share her news first. She did so and everyone started cheering. And then the husband told the group that he just got saved a minute ago and people started high-fiving and hugging. I thought a revival was going to break out. What happened? The gospel broke through. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives!

Jesus calls us to prioritize a place for prayer and to preach in all places. Here are the four fundamentals of faith that we’ve seen modeled in Jesus.

1. Start your day with prayer.
2. Stamp your life with faithfulness, not popularity.
3. Strategize to reach other places.
4. Stand on gospel preaching.

Here’s what I think. We prioritize what we care about. Or to say it another way: we do what we want to do. To say we don’t have time to put the fundamentals of faith into practice is really to say that we value other things more. Here then are a few action steps to take this sermon from preaching to practice.

Action Steps

1. Have a Quiet Time every day with the Lord.

Simply put, you will not grow if you do not develop the discipline of a daily time of Bible reading and prayer. We’ve seen a lot of people get saved recently so it strikes me that some may not know how to do this. There are two big things to accomplish in a daily appointment with Christ – talk to God through prayer and hear from God through His Word. It’s helpful to follow a Bible reading plan and we have some available in the lobby. Or you could read a chapter from the Gospel of Mark every day. Determine to do it. Schedule it now. If you don’t, it won’t happen. If you wait to do it when you have the time, you won’t find the time. Remember this: time spent with God is time well spent.

Psalm 143:8: “Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.”

When we dial in with God we receive direction for our days.

Adrian Rogers has written a very helpful post called, “How to Have a Meaningful Quiet Time.” I’ve posted a link on the sermon

extras tab on our website and have also made a number of copies available on the Resource Table in the lobby. I especially like the questions he suggests to help guide our Bible reading time:

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a lesson to learn?
- Is there a new truth to carry with me?

2. Decide to give locally and globally as part of your Christmas giving.

We want to encourage as many as can to give towards the mobile ultrasound unit for Pregnancy Resources and to participate in Operation Christmas Child. Maybe you could give one less gift to your family this year so you can give generously to these two projects.

3. Strive to have one gospel conversation every day.

Look for ways to talk about Christ with your family, your neighbors, your classmates, and your co-workers.

Conclusion. [Hold up the second glass jar and put the big rocks in first]. These rocks represent God's priorities in your life - prayer and Bible reading, gathering, growing, giving and going. Here's the deal. If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all. [Then pour in the sand to show that there's room for everything else after you first put the most important things in].

When it all comes down to it, Jesus is calling each of us to follow Him. Are you ready to do that right now?

Where You go I'll go
Where You stay I'll stay
When You move I'll move
I will follow

Invitation: "I Will Follow"

Mark 1:40-45 **Touching the Untouchable**

He knew something was wrong...very wrong. But he hoped if he waited long enough, it would just go away. But it didn't. In fact, it only got worse. Soon, others started to notice that he looked pale and sickly; and he realized that he would have to take a journey to a far-away city to figure out what exactly was going on.

After several days, he reached Jerusalem and was shown to a room. After what seemed like several hours, the door opened and an official looking man entered and examined the stranger, "It's here," as he rolled up his sleeve to reveal an open, runny sore. Again he said, "It's here," as he slipped his collar to the side, exposing another oozing puss-filled pimple. "It's here too," as he removed his sandal, where there was yet another nasty nodule on the top of his foot.

And with that, the official jumped back with a wild look in his eyes and said to the man, "I declare unto you that you are unclean." And then he quoted Leviticus 13:45-46: "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp."

He then said one last sentence: "May God have mercy on your soul!" And at once, the door slammed shut and the priest was gone.

The man's worst nightmare had just come true. Leprosy was the most dreaded disease at that time, much like AIDS or Ebola today. As he slowly picked himself up, he stood in that dark room for several minutes in a state of shock. Then, with determination, he started ripping his favorite robe that his wife had made for him. Then he bent down and gathered some dust and rubbed it all over his face and hair until he looked like someone from a horror movie. When he stepped outside, he slowly covered his mouth and choked out the dreaded words, "UNCLEAN! I'M UNCLEAN!!!"

And for the first time in his life, people wretched and recoiled when they saw him. A mother quickly grabbed her children and yelled,

“Don’t touch that man! Stayaway from him!” A vendor of vegetables threw something at him and shouted, “GET OUT OF HERE!”

Quickly the leper made his way outside the city into the open countryside and headed for the 80-mile walk home. But the worst was yet to come, because he knew he could no longer have contact with his wife or children! When his wife saw him coming from a distance, she and their children ran to him with joy and excitement, only to hear him growl, “KEEP AWAY FROM ME! I AM NO LONGER YOUR FATHER! I AM A LEPER!”

A funeral was held for him by the local Rabbi because he was considered dead the moment he was diagnosed. The man’s health went downhill quickly. His body started decomposing and the odor of death poured out of every pore. He lost all feeling in his extremities and could no longer sense pain. His fingers eventually fell off. The word “leprosy” is from lepros, meaning scaly. In the Old Testament “leprosy” means “to rot” and that’s exactly what was happening. His skin was like a pool of slime. He was a dead man walking...or trying to walk.

When people saw him they would throw stones at him...as he neared the end of his life, his face resembled a lion’s more than a man’s. He hardly looked human anymore. He was isolated and unwanted. One of the laws added by the rabbis said that it was unlawful for a leper to get within 50 feet of a clean person. On a windy day the rule changed to 200 feet.

Leprosy was a physical disease but it also made this man spiritually dirty and socially distant. He was decaying and dying in slow motion as he progressively self-destructed. His eyesight was failing and he knew complete blindness was approaching. The leper had become utterly repulsive to others...and to himself!

These five words describe his condition [Hold up cardboard sign].

Unclean! Unwanted! Unworthy! Unloved! Isolated!

In Mark 1:40-45, we’re going to learn that Jesus loves the unlovely and touches the untouchable. As we walk through this passage we’ll see the man’s misery, Jesus’ mercy and finally, the mission he was given.

1. Misery.

This man was in misery. Men like him were told to “stand at a distance” like the 10 lepers did in Luke 17:12. But according to Mark 1:40 this outcast “came to him, imploring him, and kneeling, said to him...” It’s really amazing that he “came to Christ” because lepers were forced to live in isolation and to have no personal contact with any person.

Because he was in such misery, he came to Christ. This mass of rotting flesh had faith that Jesus could heal what no one else could. Dr. Luke mentions in Luke 5:12 that he was “full of leprosy” or “covered” with it and that he “fell on his face.” Matthew 8:2 tells us that the leper addressed Jesus as “Lord.” The word “imploring” means, “to beseech strongly or to beg.” This reminds me of how passionately Moses asked God to heal his sister Miriam’s leprosy in Numbers 12:13: “And Moses cried to the LORD, ‘O God, please heal her—please.’”

As he stumbled through the crowd on what remained of his feet, the crowd would have gasped in horror, covered their mouths and noses, and scattered. It took courage to come to Christ in the presence of all these people. It also took great humility. With his vocal chords damaged by numerous nodules, his voice would have been raspy, his breath wheezy in sound and putrid in smell: “If you will, you can make me clean.”

Brothers and sisters, this is the right way to ask Jesus for help. The man knew that Jesus could make him clean - he had great confidence in His power; he just wasn’t sure if He would. He came on his knees and begged and yet he was submissive to the Sovereignty of the Savior.

Would you notice that he didn’t “claim” what he thought was his or demand it with a certain formula? One prosperity preacher, who previously raised funds for a \$65 million personal jet, recently tweeted: “Jesus bled and died for us so that we can lay claim to the promise of financial prosperity.” I’m sorry but I thought He bled and died to forgive us for our sins!

And so the first thing we see is this man’s misery. Second, we see the mercy of Jesus.

2. Mercy.

While everyone else was repulsed by the leper and couldn’t even look at him, verse 41 says that Jesus was “moved with pity.” This means He was so “filled with compassion” that it gripped him deeply in his gut, or literally, in his bowels. Jesus felt the agony of the leper’s isolation. It was common for Christ to be filled with compassion as we see in Mark 6:34: “He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

So, here’s a question. When you see someone in misery are you moved with mercy?

Jesus did more than just feel some mercy. He was touched in his heart and therefore “He stretched out his hand and touched him.” This was not a tentative touch. The Greek refers to Jesus “extending” his hand and “fastening or adhering” to the leper. Rather than pulling back, He reached out and gripped the leper. He was not repelled or repulsed [Go and touch someone]. This guy had probably not been touched in years.

Jesus loved to give the touch of tenderness. I count 8 times in the Gospel of Mark where we read of Him touching someone. Pastor Kent Hughes once counseled a man who was not a Christian. He had no family and no church. He was so lonely that he got his hair cut once a week just so someone could touch him.

Don’t miss the significance of Jesus touching a leper. No one was allowed to even get close to a leper because uncleanness would be transferred to the one who touched him. In addition, the leprosy itself could be passed on. But deity cannot be defiled.

And then Jesus declared, “I will...” Everything has to do with His will, doesn’t it? He can do anything but it must line up with His will and His timing in order for it to happen. Jesus then says: “Be clean!” When His will is ready all He needs to do is say the word and it will happen. Verse 42: “And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.” “Immediately” is Mark’s favorite word, used over 40 times in his manuscript.

In that split second, this man’s fingers were back. The leprosy had come on in stages but it left suddenly. His toes were attached again. His skin became soft and supple. His eyesight was back to normal. He was instantly cured and cleansed.

What happens next is a bit surprising and even startling.

3. Mission.

Jesus is not done. He sees misery and extends mercy so that this man will live on mission. Jesus doesn’t give a suggestion but actually is about to give an extremely strong command. Check out Mark 1:40-43: “And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once...”

- It was authoritative – “Jesus sternly charged him...” This word was used of a horse snorting.
- It was forceful – “and sent him away...” This literally means that “he thrust him out of the crowd” because he had a mission to accomplish.
- It was urgent – “at once.”

In Mark 1:44 the command of Christ is quite clear: “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” There are actually two parts to this command, one negative: “say nothing to anyone,” and one positive: “show yourself to the priest.” This man, who is in Galilee, is told to make the journey to Jerusalem, which would take several days, and to meet with the priest [maybe the same one who had diagnosed him] and follow what the Law dictated.

But the man disobeys in Mark 1:45: “But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news...” I like how the King James renders this verse: “But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter...”

Interestingly, he’s told to not tell anybody, and he tells everybody; we’re told to tell everybody and we don’t tell anybody. He was touched and so he went out and testified, but he ended up harming, more than helping the cause of Christ: “...so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to Him from every quarter.”

I can think of five reasons why this man’s actions were detrimental.

- It was disobedient. 1 Samuel 15:22 says, “To obey is better than sacrifice.” Here’s a question. Have you been delivered like the leper but still have an area of disobedience in your life? It’s common for people to get what they want from Jesus and then turn around and do what they want. Do you find yourself saying, “I know what the Bible says...but?”

Some of us won’t obey if we don’t understand. Listen. Just get over it. You won’t understand everything Jesus asks you to do. There will be some things He says and does that won’t make sense to you. If you ever find yourself thinking something like this, “I just can’t see God being that way...it doesn’t make sense to me...” you should stop and check your heart. Ponder this statement: “Faith means doing what God has told you to do, even if you don’t fully understand the reason why.”

- It hampered Jesus. It’s interesting that now the leper can go into the cities but Jesus can’t. Disobedience, even if it comes from good motives, can lead to the hindering of the work of Jesus. Here’s a question: Do you have any disobedience going on that is hindering the work of Jesus right now?
- It confused the mission. The people flocked to His miracles more than the message of the gospel. Jesus came to preach, not to

perform for others. The miracles were intended to validate His message and His mission.

- It short-circuited ministry to the priests. The priests missed out on compelling proof that Jesus was who He said He was. The cleansing of the leper was an undeniable messianic sign according to Matthew 11:5. If the priests declared the leper clean but rejected the One who cleansed him, their unbelief would be incriminating evidence against them.
- It kept him from fully entering society. Had he gone to the priest he would have been given documentation that he was no longer to be ostracized from the community. His disobedience ended up hurting the cause of Christ and himself. Disobedience does that.

A Miracle with a Message

Within this miracle, there is a message for each of us today. I want to break it down for two groups of people -- first for those who are not yet saved and then for those of us who are followers of Christ.

1. A Message for Unbelievers.

This encounter between the Lord and the leper is a parable about sin and salvation.

- Sin, like leprosy, starts out small and spreads -- laziness turns to lust; alcohol to alcoholism; petting on a date can lead to pregnancy.
- Like leprosy, sin can deaden and numb us.
- Sin can progressively enslave us.
- Like leprosy, sin defiles everything it touches.
- Sin spiritually disfigures us.
- Sin isolates us.
- Satan presents sin as pleasurable when, in fact, it's putrid.
- Sin can destroy our lives. As someone has said, "Sin will take you further than you planned to go, cost you more than you can pay, and keep you longer than you were planning to stay."
- Like leprosy, sin is terminal.
- Anything a leper touched was destined for the fire (Leviticus 13:52). Likewise, sin leads to eternal judgment.

Fellow sinner, see yourself as miserable for you are filled with the leprosy of sin and fling yourself upon the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ! You have a deadly disease that has defiled you. Some of you have not been saved yet precisely because you don't see yourself as a sick sinner. Apart from Christ, every one of us is a mess of rotting flesh, the stench of our sin being repugnant before a holy God.

What Jesus did for the leper He can do for you as well. One touch from the Savior and you will never be the same again. Nothing is too gross or ugly or dirty or shameful for the Savior to cleanse!

Dear friend, do you need cleansing today? Will you come to Jesus and fall at His feet and say, "Lord, I'm desperate and need help. I have a sin problem and I'm miserable. I know I'm going to die from this sin unless you forgive me. Please show me mercy. I know you can save me. Will you? I ask you right now to touch my sinful heart and take away my sin and then enable me to live on mission for you."

After being cleansed by Christ, the leper would be able to write some new words to describe his life. [hold up cardboard sign]

Clean! Wanted! I have worth! Loved! In community!

Our misery is worse than we think...the mercy of Jesus is deeper than we imagine...and our mission is greater than we realize.

2. A Message for Believers.

Fellow followers of Jesus, we're called to reach out with compassion, to love the unlovable and touch the untouchable.

A week ago I was listening to Janet Parshall on Moody Radio (one of our "Go" partners). She was interviewing Craig Groeschel about his new book called, "#Struggles – Following Jesus in a Selfie-Centered World." He quoted a groundbreaking study of 14,000 people that showed a sharp decline in compassion in our culture. Here's a summary – "We care 40% less as a whole than we did in

the 1980s.” There are three reasons for this:

#1. In our selfie-centered world, we have become increasingly obsessed with ourselves.

#2. We have less personal interaction with people, which makes it easy to not care.

#3. The overwhelming exposure to news and needs in the world is actually desensitizing us.

Whenever we read something on a screen everything gets equal “real estate” and looks equally important: “If I’m scrolling through I might see a new recipe for guacamole, and then a story about a football player beating his girlfriend and then a link to a funny cat video and then a picture of someone being beheaded by ISIS.”

Researchers argue that our brains don’t know how to distinguish between how all these stories show up in our newsfeeds. An ISIS beheading doesn’t grab our attention because it shows up right next to guacamole and cat videos.

Friends, we are called to compassionately care for people, not just on a screen, but face-to-face. Who do you need to reach out and touch, literally?

Two years ago my daughter Lydia and I visited my oldest daughter Emily who was serving as a missionary to at-risk children in the Dominican Republic. I’ll never forget walking up a steep hillside with a number of kids on the way to their village. A young boy reached out to hold my hand. I looked at his hand and saw that it was dirty and had open sores. I pulled my hand back. And then I looked up the hill and saw Emily. Both of her hands held the hands of two children. Another young girl was riding on her back. Lydia was also holding hands with two little girls. I was convicted and reached out for the young boy’s hand. He looked up at me and smiled, through rotting teeth. I felt rotten inside and was thankful for the example of my daughters as they followed Jesus more fully than I was.

Here are some groups of people that could use a touch from us.

- Those with depression and mental illness
- The elderly, especially those in a nursing home
- Widows and widowers
- Those from a different political party
- Those of a different race or ethnicity
- Refugees
- Women who get pregnant outside of marriage (glad that we’re raising funds for a mobile ultrasound van!)
- Singles
- Single parents
- The preborn
- The orphans
- The less fortunate
- Those with AIDS
- The alone and forgotten
- The disabled
- Those with cancer
- Anyone not in your clique or social class
- Or anyone you’re holding a grudge against
- Those with hurts, habits and hang-ups – I’m sure glad Celebrate Recovery is a place of grace! The 14th Anniversary service is next Friday night.

Philip Yancey writes: “The modern church rejects the outcasts of society where as these very outcasts were the very ones who were drawn to Jesus.” To Jesus, no one is untouchable. Here’s a question: Are you moved with mercy over the plight of the miserable?

If you’ve moved from being miserable to receiving mercy, you are now on mission. It’s time to start living that way. As we learned from Mike Hillhouse last weekend, our glorious mission is to take the gospel to the nations: “Missions is not a commitment to keep; it’s a cross to carry.”

As a follow-up to last weekend, we’re participating in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. We want to conclude by focusing on these faithful followers.

Interview with Chasity Holmquist

1. Tell us a bit about yourself.
2. How did you get interested in Voice of the Martyrs and how has it impacted you?
3. Can you share a couple real-life illustrations of how Christians are being persecuted?
4. How can we respond?

- Prisoners
- Giving
- Prayer

We're going to watch a video of a frontline worker right now and when it's finished, we're going to pray for the persecuted.

Persecution is a terrible thing, but unfaithfulness is far worse. (Pritchard)

When you leave today we want you to pick up some information to help put your faith into practice.

Mark 1:40-45

Jesus' Upside Down Kingdom

[Note: Elements of this introduction come from a sermon called "From Leprosy to Life" by John Mayes].

He knew something was wrong...very wrong. But he hoped that if he waited long enough, it would just go away. But it didn't. In fact, it only got worse. Soon, others started to notice that he looked pale and sickly; and he realized that he would have to take a journey to a far-away city to figure out what exactly was going on.

After several days, he reached the city and made his way to a room where he had never been before in order to speak to someone he had not met before. After what seemed like several hours, the door opened and a man wearing a uniform entered. The man examined the stranger, "It's here," as he rolled up his sleeve and revealed an open, runny sore. Again he said, "It's here," as he slipped his collar to the side, exposing another oozing sore. "It's here too," as he removed his sandal, where there was yet another puss-filled nodule on the top of his foot.

And with that, the priest jumped back with a wild look in his eyes and said to the man, "I declare unto you that you are unclean. Now hear the words of the law: 'A Leper must wear torn clothes, and his hair must be unkempt, and everywhere he goes, he must cover his mouth with his hand and shout out, 'unclean, unclean.' He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.' May God have mercy on your soul!" And at once, the door slammed shut and the priest was gone.

The man's worse nightmare had just come true. As he slowly picked himself up, he stood there in that dark room for several minutes in a state of shock. Then, with determination, he started ripping his favorite robe that his wife had made for him. Then he bent down and gathered some dust and rubbed it all over his face and hair until he looked like nothing more than a wild-man. When he stepped outside and squinted at the brightness of the light, he slowly covered his mouth with his hand and choked out the dreaded words, "UNCLEAN! I'M UNCLEAN!!!"

And for the first time in his life, people wretched and recoiled when they saw him. A mother quickly grabbed her children and yelled, "Don't touch that man! Stay away from him!" A vendor of vegetables on the street corner threw something at him and shouted, "GET OUT OF HERE!"

Quickly the leper made his way outside the city into the open countryside and headed for home. But the worst was yet to come, because he knew he could no longer have contact with his wife or children! When his wife saw him coming from a distance, she and their children ran to their father with joy and excitement, only to hear him growl at them and say, "KEEP AWAY FROM ME! I AM NO LONGER YOUR FATHER! I AM A LEPER!"

A funeral service was held for him in his village by the local Rabbi because he was considered dead the moment he was diagnosed. The man's health went downhill quickly. He was covered from head to toe with a sickly stench that took one's breath away. His body started decomposing and the odor of death poured out of every pore. The word "leprosy" is from lepro, meaning scaly. In the Old

Testament “leprosy” means “to rot” and that’s exactly what was happening. His skin was like a pool of slime. Dr. Luke mentions in Luke 5:12 that he was “full of leprosy” or “covered” with it. It’s like someone having full-blown AIDS or terminal cancer. He was a dead man walking.

When people saw him they would throw stones at him...as he neared the end of his life, his face resembled a lion’s more than a man’s. He hardly looked human anymore. He was isolated and unwanted. One of the laws added by the rabbis said that it was unlawful for a leper to approach within 50 feet of a clean person. On a windy day the rule changed to 200 feet.

The man’s eyesight was failing; he knew complete blindness was approaching. He had already lost all of his fingers, five of his toes, and one of his ears. The leper had become utterly repulsive to others...and to himself! If this man would have joined us on Easter, and if he could have held a marker in his hand, he would have scribbled out these five words on his sign [Hold up cardboard sign].

Unclean!
Unwanted!
Unworthy!
Unloved!
Isolated!

Pastor Jeff kicked off our new series from Mark’s gospel last week by asking the question, “Who is This Man?” I hope you’ve taken his challenge to read a chapter from Mark every day as we seek to answer this question about Jesus. After being baptized and then tempted for 40 days in the desert, Jesus calls some men to be his disciples, drives out an evil spirit and heals a lot of people, including Peter’s mother-in-law. Mark 1:28 tells us that “News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.” One day, as was His custom, Jesus got up very early and found a solitary place to pray. Peter and his pals find Him anyway and tell Him that everyone is looking for Him.

Here’s something important to remember. While Jesus did a lot of miracles, He did not want people to just see Him as a miracle-worker, as someone who would only meet their physical needs. He came for another purpose, which was to preach the gospel. Look with me at Mark 1:38: “Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

That sets the context for our text today in Mark 1:40-45. We’re going to learn that in Jesus’ Upside-Down Kingdom, He loves the unlovely and touches the untouchable.

1. Misery.

Let’s go back to the leper and establish our first point today. This man was in misery. Men like him were told to “stand at a distance” like the 10 lepers did in Luke 17:12. But according to Mark 1:40 this outcast “came to Him and begged Him on his knees...” Luke adds that he “fell on his face.” Matthew tells us that he came worshipping and “knelt before him.” The word “begged” means “to beseech strongly.” As he stumbled through the crowd on what remained of his feet, the crowd would have gasped in horror, covered their mouths and noses, and scattered.

It took courage to come to Christ in front of the crowds. It also took great humility. And he did so with reverence. With his vocal chords damaged by numerous nodules his voice would have been raspy, his breath wheezy in sound and putrid in smell: “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Friends, this is the right way to pray. The man knew that Jesus could make him clean - he had great confidence in His power; he just wasn’t sure if He would. He came on his knees and begged and yet he was submissive to the Sovereignty of the Savior. Luke mentions that he called Him “Lord.” Would you notice that he didn’t “claim” what he thought was his or demand it with a certain formula like some prosperity preachers have made popular? Essentially he was saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can do anything. This is what I want but I don’t know if it’s your will.” Let me also point out that the leper asked to be spiritually clean, not just to be physically healed.

And so the first thing we see is this man’s misery. Second, we see the mercy of Jesus.

2. Mercy.

While everyone else was repulsed by the leper, Jesus was moved by mercy. Verse 41 says that he was “filled with compassion.” This means that it gripped him deeply in his gut. He felt the agony of his isolation, his pain and his plight. It was common for Christ to be filled with compassion as we see in Mark 6:33 when, after seeing the huge crowds running on foot to see Him, we read this: “He

had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.”

But He did more than just feel compassion. He was touched in his heart and therefore reached out and touched with His hands: “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.” This was not a tentative touch. The Greek terms refer to Jesus “stretching” out his hand and “fastening or adhering” to the leper. This guy had probably not been touched in years.

The Gospel of Mark majors on the touch of Jesus. Let’s look at a few examples.

Mark 1:31 - In healing Simon’s mother-in-law, Jesus “went to her, took her hand and helped her up.”

Mark 5:41 - When a little girl died, Jesus “took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’”

Mark 7:33 - When healing a deaf and mute man, “Jesus put his fingers into his ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue.”

Mark 8:23 - People begged Jesus to touch a blind man and so “He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’”

Mark 9:27 - After healing a boy that had an evil spirit, “Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.”

Mark 10:16 - When people brought children to Jesus to have Him touch them, He did much more than that: “And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them.”

Jesus loved to give the touch of tenderness. Don’t miss the significance of this. No one was allowed to touch a leper because his uncleanness would be transferred to the one who touched him. In addition, the leprosy itself could be passed on. But deity cannot be defiled. Incidentally, according to the Old Testament, only the High Priest could touch a leper...after he was healed. This touch would tell others that the leper was clean. Jesus, as the Great High Priest, touched the leper and made him clean. And He’s still touching lives today.

And then Jesus declared, “I am willing...” Everything has to do with His will, doesn’t it? He can do anything but it must line up with His will and His timing in order for it to happen. Jesus then says: “Be clean!” When His will is ready all He needs to do is say the word and it will happen. Verse 42: “Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.” “Immediately” is Mark’s favorite word, used over 40 times in his gospel. This man’s fingers were back. His toes were attached again. His skin became soft and supple. His eyesight was back to normal. He was instantly cured and cleansed. The leper had a new lease on life.

And so we see a man in misery who meets the mercy of the Lord Jesus. In Jesus’ upside-down kingdom, the unlovable is loved and the untouchable is touched. What happens next is a bit surprising and even startling.

3. Mission. Jesus is not done. He sees misery and extends mercy so that this man will live on mission. Jesus doesn’t give a suggestion but actually is about to give an extremely stern command. Check out verse 43: “Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning...” Jesus sent him away, which literally means that “he thrust him out of the crowd” because he had a mission to accomplish. Notice that it was urgent - “at once.” And it was authoritative - “with a strong warning.” This is a very powerful picture for it was used of a horse snorting when it was impatient or irritated. Jesus looked very serious and stern and what He is about to say He says with sharpness.

In verse 44 the command of Christ is quite clear: “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” There are actually two parts to this command, one negative and one positive. The negative is this: don’t tell anyone. And the positive is to tell someone: he was to go to the priest. This man, who is in Galilee, is told to make the journey to Jerusalem, which would take a couple days, and to meet with the priest and follow what the Law dictated. We don’t have time to get into all the verses that deal with this so let me just mention two.

- Deuteronomy 24:8 - “In cases of leprous diseases be very careful to do exactly as the priests, who are Levites, instruct you. You must follow carefully what I have commanded them.”
- Leviticus 14:2-4 - “The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him.” A ceremony involving two birds and some other items took place. Essentially it worked like this. One bird was killed and its blood was sprinkled on the live bird and then the live bird would fly away, signifying that it’s the blood of a sacrifice that cleanses and that our sins fly away when we put our faith in God.

I wrote down some reasons why Jesus could have wanted this guy to go and proclaim his healing to the priest.

- To validate the miracle. Nothing like this had happened in at least 800 years. I can only think of Miriam and Naaman from the Old Testament who had been healed of leprosy.

- To help the man be accepted socially and spiritually. Leviticus 14 says that the priest would issue a certificate of cleansing after verifying the healing.
- To uphold the Old Testament. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17: "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."
- To give a strong testimony to the priests. The priests and Bible scholars knew that the Messiah would be able to heal lepers. That's exactly what Jesus told John's disciples to tell John when he wondered if Jesus was the Messiah in Matthew 11:5: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk and those who have leprosy are healed."

But the man disobeys in verse 45: "Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news..." I like how the King James handles this verse: "But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter..." Interestingly, he's told to not tell anybody, and he tells everybody; we're told to tell everybody and we don't tell anybody. He was touched and so he went out and testified, but he ended up harming, more than helping the cause of Christ: "...As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."

What he did was not good for at least four reasons...

- It was disobedient. 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "To obey is better than sacrifice." Here's a question. Have you been delivered like the leper but still have an area of disobedience in your life? It's common for people to get what they want from Jesus and then turn around and do what they want. Do you find yourself saying, "I know what the Bible says...but?" Friends, in the midst of our cultural confusion, we must determine to follow and obey what God says. God has spoken and He has not stuttered. Life begins at conception and therefore abortion is murder. Marriage is between one man and one woman for life. Children belong to their families, not to the state.
- It hampered Jesus. It's interesting that now the leper can go into the cities but Jesus can't.
- It confused the mission. The people flocked to His miracles more than the message of the gospel. Jesus came to preach not to perform for others. The miracles were intended to validate the message and His mission, clearly summarized by Jesus in Mark 10:45: "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
- It short-circuited ministry to the priests. They missed out on compelling evidence that Jesus was who He said He was.

A Miracle with a Message

Within this miracle, there is a message for each of us today. I want to break it down for two groups of people -- first for believers and then for those of you who have not yet committed yourself to Christ.

1. A Message for Believers. Fellow followers of Jesus, we're called to reach out with compassion, loving the unlovable and touching the untouchable. Some of you know what happened to Kevin Ware who plays for the NCAA champion Louisville basketball team. After suffering a horrific injury to his leg in the tournament, some of his teammates saw what happened and started vomiting. Others were crying inconsolably. But then his teammate Luke Hancock ran over to him, held his hand and prayed this prayer: "Lord, watch over us and let Kevin be OK during this tough time." He then told his teammate: "The Lord does everything for a reason, and he will get us through this." He then gently patted Ware's chest several times as more than 34,000 fans watched in the stadium and millions of horrified TV viewers looked on.

Who do you need to reach out and touch, literally? I wrote down some groups that are treated like lepers today.

- Those with depression and mental illness (Rick Warren's son)
- The elderly, especially those in a nursing home
- Those from a different political party
- Those of a different race or ethnicity
- Women who get pregnant outside of marriage (celebrate fundraiser for the Elizabeth Home)
- The preborn
- The orphans
- The less fortunate (celebrate Caring Closet)
- Those with AIDS
- The alone and forgotten
- The disabled
- Those with cancer
- Anyone not in your clique or social class
- Or anyone you're holding a grudge against

Philip Yancey writes: "The modern church rejects the outcasts of society where as these very outcasts were the very ones who were drawn to Jesus." Here's a question: Are you moved with mercy over the plight of the miserable?

An English cathedral was severely damaged during WWII. A statue of Jesus had read, "Come unto me" but the hands had been completely demolished. If you go there today the statue is still standing and the hands are still gone but the inscription has been changed. It now reads, "He has no hands but ours."

If you've moved from being miserable to receiving mercy, you are now on mission. It's time to start living that way.

2. A Message for Unbelievers. This story is also about sin and salvation. Leprosy in the Bible was symbolic of sin.

- Sin, like leprosy, starts out small and spreads -- laziness turns to lust; alcohol to alcoholism; petting on a date can lead to pregnancy.
- Like leprosy, sin can deaden and numb us.
- Sin can progressively enslave us. John 8:34 - "Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.'"
- Sin defiles everything it touches.
- Sin spiritually disfigures us.
- Sin isolates us.
- Satan presents sin as pleasurable when in fact, it's putrid.
- Sin can destroy our lives. As someone has said, "Sin will take you further than you planned to go and keep you longer than you were planning to stay."
- Like leprosy, sin is terminal.
- Anything a leper touched was destined for the fire (Lev. 13:52). Likewise, sin leads to eternal judgment.

Fellow sinner, see your misery as miserable for you are filled with the leprosy of sin and fling yourself upon the mercy of Christ, who is filled with compassion. Some of you have not been saved yet precisely because you don't see yourself as a sick sinner. But it's not until we understand the depth of our depravity that we will come to Christ in spite of what the crowd is doing and fall on our face before Him. It's time now to come to him with humility. It's time to drop to your knees before Him, like Pastor Jeff had us do last week.

What Jesus did for the leper he can do for anyone here today. He took the place of the leper, and was crucified outside the gate of the city. Friend, nothing is too gross or ugly or dirty or shameful for the Savior to cleanse! Nothing is beyond the scope of Jesus' compassion. The leper had a transforming moment with the Master. This could be yours right now.

It's Time to Be Touched

David Dykes summarizes the movie called, "The Elephant Man," based on a true story of a terribly disfigured man named John Merrick, who lived in London during the 19th century. His own family had rejected him because of his hideous appearance. A doctor found John working in a circus as a sideshow freak and so he took him to a hospital and began to treat him as a person. He provided books for John and soon discovered he was a kind, intelligent person.

After a newspaper reported on John's progress, a talented actress came to visit him. She was also a committed Christian. On one visit she presented John with a copy of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. He felt like an ugly beast cowering before a pretty princess. He was at such a loss for words he opened the script and began to read. His voice was squeaky as he read from the second act: "See how she leans her cheek upon her hand! O that I were a glove upon the hand that I might touch that cheek!"

As he read that line, Madge Kendall slipped quietly into the seat beside him. She responded with the words of Juliet she had memorized from her years in the theater. John read and she recited the rest of the act together. When it was done, she leaned over and kissed his swollen, leathery cheek. From that moment on, John Merrick was a changed man!

Sin has disfigured each of us until even our righteousness is as filthy rags. Compared to the perfect holiness of God, our sinful lives are hideous and grotesque. But the Lord Jesus Christ leaned over at Calvary and kissed our sin-shriveled lives with the mercies of heaven and since that day, none of us have ever been the same.

Dear friend do you need cleansing today? Will you come to Jesus and fall at His feet and say,

"Lord, I need help. I have a sin problem and I'm miserable. I know I'm going to die from this sin unless you forgive me. Please show

me mercy. I know you can save me. Will you? I ask you right now to touch my sinful heart and take away my sin and then enable me to live on mission for you.”

I received an email from someone who attended our Easter service two weeks ago. This is what he wrote: “Back to the sign thing, I think I would need a refrigerator box or two to write my sins on it...But I can’t imagine how many boxes I would need to count the ways God has blessed us in these last 18 months!”

After being cleansed by Christ, the leper would need a large sign as well to recount all that Christ had done for Him [hold up sign].

Clean!

Wanted!

I have worth!

Loved!

In community!

Our misery is worse than we think...the mercy of Jesus is deeper than we imagine...and our mission is greater than we realize

Mark 2:1-12

The Best Help You Can Give

Have you ever been in a place that was so crowded you could barely move? Where was that for you? For me it was every time I rode the Metro (subway) in Mexico City when we lived there for three years. I never thought I was claustrophobic but I think that was where my phobia first got its start.

As we continue in our series through the gospel penned by Mark and inspired by God, we see again that Jesus is drawing huge crowds. Here’s where we’re headed today. We’re going to walk through an incredible encounter that takes place in Mark 2:1-12. I’ll read the passage, adding some interpretative insight and application as we go along. When we’re finished with the text we’ll focus on some takeaways and then we’ll celebrate communion. To help with the flow of thought, I’ve adapted an outline from John Stevenson for the first part of the sermon.

1. Setting.

Let’s begin in Mark 2:1-2: “And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, [Jesus has been on a preaching mission in Galilee for many weeks, and now comes back to his home base] it was reported that he was at home [this is likely Peter and Andrew’s house, where Peter’s mother-in-law had been healed]. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. [Jesus was like a magnet to the crowds. There were so many people gathered that there was no way anyone else could get close. The use of the double negative intensifies the situation – it was packed inside and it was a traffic jam outside].

And he was preaching the word to them.” [This is the word for conversation, not “preaching” per se. It speaks of “lovely sounds.” This reminds me of the lyrics from “In the Garden” – “He speaks and the sound of his voice is so sweet, the birds hush their singing.” It’s important for us to not just preach at people but to also be able to dialog and discuss, using pleasing words].

2. Sickness.

Let’s continue in Mark 2:3-4: “And they came, bringing [carrying] to him a paralytic [this word describes someone who has lost control of his body either through a stroke, a disease, or from birth] carried by four men [each holding a corner of the mat he was on]. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, [that had to have been disappointing] they removed [uncovered, literally “unroofed the roof”] the roof above him [houses had flat roofs that served like a patio with an outside stairway], and when they had made an opening, [roofs were made out of a combination of thatch, mortar, tar, sand, branches, and mud].

[Can you imagine if a hole appeared in the ceiling right now? We’d all look up and the dust and the debris would be falling on us. The hole would have been made big enough to let the man down through it] they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. [The man would have been laid at Jesus’ feet. There was no doubt a hush in the house. Imagine if you looked up and saw a man being lowered through the roof right now! That would be distraction, wouldn’t it? Most of us lose focus when someone comes in late or leaves to use the restroom.]

3. Startling Statement.

In Mark 2:5 we read: “And when Jesus saw their faith [Jesus was not bothered by the interruption at all. This is the first appearance of “faith” in Mark’s gospel. Notice that Jesus saw “their faith.” We’ll come back to this in a few minutes], he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, [this was a term of deep affection similar to saying, “My child.” Matthew 9:2 includes this phrase, “Take heart, my son...”] your sins are forgiven.” [To forgive sins means to send them away; to cancel a debt. This is quite startling because it was assumed that this man’s main need was to be healed of his paralysis. But actually that was his felt need; his foremost need was to be forgiven for his sins. Forgiveness of sin is at the heart of Christianity and is its greatest miracle because it lasts forever].

4. Skepticism of the Scribes.

The main job of the scribes was to copy the Scriptures and to be guardians of God’s Word. That’s probably why they were in the house in the first place because they were checking to make sure that what Jesus was saying lined up with Scripture. Look at Mark 2:6-7: “Now some of the scribes were sitting there [It’s interesting that in this SRO crowd (“Standing Room Only”), the scribes are seated, as if in judgment. This shows us that there are followers and foes in the room], questioning in their hearts [note that they didn’t say any of this out loud], ‘Why does this man speak like that? [BTW, each episode of controversy in this chapter is provoked by a question about the behavior of Jesus or the disciples] He is blaspheming! [This charge is repeated in Mark 14:61-64 as rationale for Jesus eventually being put to death] Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Actually, the scribes were technically correct. Only God can forgive sins. We see this in Isaiah 43:25: “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” Daniel 9:9 says, “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him.”

Tim Keller offers a helpful illustration. Suppose Tom, Dick and Harry are hanging out when Tom stands up and punches Dick in the mouth. Harry then turns to Tom and says, “I forgive you for punching Dick in the mouth. All is good.” What do you think Dick would say? “Harry, you can’t forgive Tom. Only I can forgive him. He didn’t wrong you; he wronged me.” Listen. You can only forgive a sin if it’s against you. When Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven, in essence He is saying, “Your sins have been against me.” The scribes are right – only God can forgive sins so if Jesus is claiming to be able to do this, then He’s claiming to be God.

5. A Scolding from Jesus.

I love what happens next. Jesus not only forgives sins; He reads minds, which is something else only God can do in verse 8: “And immediately [Mark loves this word because it shows that there was no delay between them thinking their thoughts and Jesus knowing their thoughts. John 2:25 says, “He himself knew what was in a man.”] Jesus, perceiving [He was not only immediately aware of their thoughts, but clearly and fully aware] in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts?’” [This had to be very unsettling to the scribes. Jesus loved to answer questions with counter questions like in Mark 11:30: “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.”

In Mark 2: 9 He asks a question that no doubt confounded them: “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’”? At first glance it’s easier to say that someone’s sins are forgiven because there’s no way to verify it. Notice the word “say.” It’s easy to say that sins are forgiven and to say someone can walk. But actually, both are difficult and impossible for man to do. Both are possible only with God.

Look at Mark 2:10-11: “But [a word of contrast] that you [the scribes] may know [Jesus wants them to understand who He is] that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise [get up now], pick up your bed [instead of lying on his stretcher; he was now to lift it up], and go home [this shows us again that our first priority is to live our faith at home and to share with our family what God has done in our lives].” By doing the visible, Jesus is proving that He can do the invisible. He can heal externally and internally. He healed the physical to show that He can heal the spiritual. This would prove that the sins of the paralytic were pardoned.

6. A Sensational Cure.

Picture the scene. The scribes have not said anything and no one but Jesus has spoken. This encounter ends powerfully in Mark 2:12: “And he rose [the man did what he was commanded to do] and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all [I picture him stepping over the seated scribes and weaving his way through the crowd. I’m sure four sets of eyes were peering down through the hole in the roof in astonishment as they fist pumped and started cheering loudly], so that they were all amazed [this means “to be beside oneself; to be blown away”] and glorified God [to magnify and recognize that it was God who did this], saying, “We never saw anything like this!” [They are astonished because his sins are forgiven and his feet are now strong]

Isaiah 35:6 says that one of the marks of the coming kingdom will be this: “Then shall the lame leap like a deer.” This also makes me think of what happened in Acts 3:8 when a paralyzed man was healed: “And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.”

Takeaways

I want to go back and pick up on a phrase found in verse 5: “And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” What do you notice? Whose faith did Jesus see? Right, it was the faith of the four friends. Sometimes Jesus acts in a person’s life because of another person’s faith. The best help you can give is to bring hurting people to Jesus. Many people will not come to Jesus unless someone brings them.

We’re not told the names of these four guys but Ray Stedman offers the following:

- Faithful Frank said, “I believe we can get this man to Jesus.”
- Hopeful Harry said, “I believe there is hope for this man.”
- Loving Larry said, “I really love this guy. I hate his sin but I love him.”
- Determined Dan said, “Let’s roll.”

The paralytic was prevented from coming to Jesus because he couldn’t get there on his own. If we hope to help those who are hindered from coming to Jesus, it would do us well to model our behavior after these four guys. Faith must be made visible according to James 2:17-18: “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

As I meditated on the phrase, “And when Jesus saw their faith,” I wrote down seven traits that these four guys demonstrated. As we go over them, ask yourself this question, “Do I exhibit these qualities toward someone who is in need of coming to Jesus? Do I have this kind of visible faith that can help bring a lost person to the feet of Jesus?”

1. Caring.

We’re not told how they knew the paralytic but obviously they cared about his condition. This reminds me of what we learned last week about how to love the lepers in our lives. Our mission is to extend mercy to those in misery. We walked through a long list of people that many of us struggle to love. I want to add one more group I inadvertently left off. We’re called to reach out in love toward homosexuals. Let me be clear. The Bible teaches that the practice of homosexuality is a sin and that marriage is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. But that doesn’t mean we can treat them as lepers. We’re called to care for all kinds of people.

Ask God to slow you down so that you see the needs of those around you. And then ask God to help you see people like he does. If you realize that you struggle with caring for those who live differently than you do, pray this simple one-sentence prayer, “God, break my heart with the things that break yours.”

2. Courageous.

It took tremendous courage for these guys to step out and bring their friend to Jesus because they had no guarantee that he would be healed. They could have felt self-conscious but they didn’t. Others might have thought they were crazy. Faith often involves risk, doesn’t?

Have you folded in your faith recently? Have you been bailing when God is calling you to be bold? Determine to speak up for the Savior when it’s difficult on your campus or at your workplace. Memorize these words given to Joshua in Joshua 1:9: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

3. Creative.

Once they got to the house, they saw that it was way too crowded to get their friend inside. They decided to think outside the box and ended up blowing the roof off (literally). When you reach out to bring someone to Jesus, you will encounter many obstacles. It will not be easy so you’ll need to get creative.

Here are some ideas that may generate some more creative ideas: Invite someone to a service or an outreach event, like the Women’s Christmas Party next month. Give them a book like “Anchor for the Soul” or “How Good is Good Enough?” Open your home for a cookie exchange in December. Reach out on social media. Rake your neighbor’s leaves. Offer to pray for someone. If

you've tried one way and it hasn't worked, don't be discouraged. Instead, get creative.

4. Committed.

They stayed with the man, even when there were roadblocks. They didn't drop him and leave him to fend for himself. It was no doubt difficult to transport him through the hilly and rocky area around Capernaum. When they saw the crowds they could have turned around but instead found some stairs and took the man to the roof. And then they broke through in order to get him inside and then they had to keep him balanced while they lowered him to Jesus.

Have you given up on anyone? Why don't you recommit to do whatever it takes to bring him or her to Jesus and then determine to hang in there for the long haul?

5. Conviction.

These guys had faith that Jesus could do something for their friend if they could just get him close enough. In their minds, nothing was too difficult for the Lord to do and if they didn't bring their buddy to Jesus he would have no hope. They were moved to action by deep conviction.

Are you convinced that those without Christ are lost in their sins? Do you doubt that Christ can save that person you know who seems so hard and bitter? Have you ever said, "He'll never get saved? She's too far gone for God to rescue?" Ask God to grow your faith.

6. Cooperation.

There was no way one guy could carry the paralytic by himself. Two wouldn't work either. Three would be better. But four was perfect because they could each take a corner. I guess we could say, "Four of a kind beats a full house." They had to be going in the same direction and traveling at the same speed and they no doubt had to coordinate efforts to get him through the roof without dropping him to the ground. This reminds me of the mission statement for the Quad Cities Missing Person Network – "We are people helping people find people." Together is always better.

We don't need to form a committee to cooperate with others in bringing people to Jesus. I like what J. Vernon McGee once said, "Committees are made up of those who take down minutes and waste hours." He added, "A committee is made up of a group of people who individually can do nothing, but together they can decide that nothing can be done."

Is there someone you can partner with to reach someone else who is far from God? Could you co-host an event? Is there someone you can take with you to visit a shut-in? Could you gather a team of Christ-followers to rake a neighbor's lawn? One way to partner with others is to connect people to another ministry here at EBC like Celebrate Recovery or Grief Share for the holidays.

7. Costly.

It will almost always cost you something to bring someone to the Savior. If it were easy everyone would be doing it. It might cost you financially. It might cost you your reputation. It will certainly cost you time and energy and maybe missing your favorite TV show. It wasn't easy to carry this guy to Jesus. Plus, they may have incurred a cost for the roof repair.

Are you willing to pay the price to bring someone to Jesus? What are you willing to give up to do so? There's no way we will be able to raise \$45,000 for the mobile ultrasound van for Pregnancy Resources without it costing us something. We will each have to sacrifice something to make it happen. Operation Christmas Child costs about \$25-\$35 to fill up a box. By the way, I heard last weekend that a newly married couple is filling 100 boxes! I know of another young family that has already done a dozen!

Prayer Post-it Notes - The first place to start when helping people come to Jesus is to begin praying for them by name. As a way to put this into practice, I want you to think of three people who don't yet know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Think of their names. Picture their faces. See their needs. Once you have three people in mind, I want you to pull out a pad of post-it notes that we've placed in the racks or chairs in front of you. When you find a pad could you take one off and then make sure the people around you have one as well? Let me tell you what we're going to do. I'd like you to write those three names on this post-it note. It might be best to just use first names or even someone's initials or a code name if you don't want anyone to know you're writing their name down. Take some time right now to do this.

Invitation We are all spiritual paralytics. Sin has put us flat on our backs and we can't get up unless the Savior does His work of forgiving. Do you remember what happened to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 4:4? He was Jonathan's son and King Saul's grandson. He

became crippled when he fell out of the arms of his nurse as she was fleeing. In a similar way we are paralyzed because of a fall as well. When Adam and Eve fell, we fell with them. Our only hope of healing is if Jesus heals us. How only hope of forgiveness is if Jesus forgives us. Romans 5:6: "For while we were still weak [paralyzed], at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

Maybe you have a felt need today. Struggling in a relationship? Health issue? Work problem? Depressed? Stressed? Addiction? Messed up? Go to Jesus with that need because He cares about you but also know that your foremost need is divine forgiveness. To only ask for help with our physical or emotional needs simply means that we haven't gone deep enough. God may not fix your presenting problem but He will solve your sin issue if you ask Him to do so.

Communion – Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-28 - As we prepare for communion today, could you hold your post-it note in your hand and pray for the people you wrote down? And ask God to embed these seven qualities into your life. The best help you can give is to bring hurting people to Jesus.

Post Your Post-it Notes - As we conclude today we're going to leave the lights down low and in a spirit of reverence I'm going to ask you to not talk to anyone as you leave. We'd like you to take your post-it note and put it up on one of the black boards that are displayed in the lobby. I'll go first and then you can follow me whenever you're ready.

Mark 2:13-17

Eating Supper with Sinners

I've been a bit quiet about the Green Bay Packers lately. I'm sure you've noticed. It may or may not be because they've lost their last two games. I actually have a solid theory about why they haven't been winning. It can all be traced to the release of the McDonald's commercial that featured long-time Bears Coach Mike Ditka wearing a Packers sweater.

Former Bears Hall of Fame linebacker Mike Singletary couldn't take it any longer when he called Ditka out on Thursday: "How in the world did they have you do that? There's just some things you can't do." Initially Bear fans winced when they saw him wearing green and gold but now I'm wondering if it wasn't all part of a plan to throw the Packers off their game. I think Ditka should go back to rooting for the Bad News Bears and everything will get back to normal.

It was unsettling for fans to see 'Da Coach' rooting for a team that he actually has hated for decades. In our passage for today, we're going to see that it was even more jarring for some religious fans to see a hated tax collector change sides and follow Jesus.

Let's stand and read Mark 2:13-17 together: "He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. 15 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Our outline for today is simple.

- Follow the Savior (Mark 2:13-14)
- Focus on Sinners (Mark 2:15-17)

Follow the Savior

Look at Mark 2:13: "He went out again beside the sea..." We learned last week that Jesus has been in Capernaum, which is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. People start running to him again: "and all the crowd was coming to him..." The tense of this word is that the crowd is building: "and He was teaching them." The idea is that He "kept teaching." We know from 1:14 that He was proclaiming the gospel of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

In the midst of all the people, Jesus noticed a person.

1. He saw Levi.

Check out verse 14: "And as he passed by He saw Levi the Son of Alphaeus..." Jesus is on mission wherever He goes. Just like

we're to be. Crowds of people are everywhere and yet He looks on to Levi. His parents had a lot of hope for him because he was named after one of the sons of Jacob. It was from the tribe of Levi that the priesthood was descended. Levi would have been raised to fulfill some kind of religious responsibility.

We make judgments based upon personal appearances but Jesus saw something more. In Matthew 9:9 we read: "He saw a man." Jesus sees past the sin and sees a servant. He can tell Levi is unsatisfied and searching for something of significance. When Jesus looks at people, He sees potential. He knows you're a mess but He also knows that you matter to Him. He sees what no one else can see. He sees your guilt and shame but He also has plans and purposes for you. Others may remind you of your past but He sees your future.

"sitting at the tax booth..." Levi was a tax collector, which was another way of saying that he was "the scum of the earth." He had purchased a tax franchise, which allowed him to charge taxes on anyone walking by his tax booth. He was required to send in a certain amount of taxes to Rome but he could charge whatever he wanted and keep the extra as personal profit. As a result, tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, often became very wealthy.

Capernaum was on the caravan route between east and west so it was a perfect place to set up a tax booth. He collected on imports and exports, on bridges, roads and harbors. He would tax the number of axles on a wagon, the number of legs on a donkey, and charge a pedestrian tax if someone was out walking. He also charged taxes on the number of fish the fishermen caught. Tax collectors were...

- Dishonest. They were known to overcharge people and when someone couldn't pay they would be given a high-interest loan. They took bribes from the rich and extorted the poor.
- Disqualified. Tax collectors were not allowed to give testimony as witnesses because no one trusted them. Their tithes weren't even accepted (BTW, we accept all tithes here).
- Disloyal. Though he was Jewish, he was considered a traitor because he worked for the hated Romans. He had turned his back on his family, his nation and his God.
- Detested. Tax collectors were classed with murderers and robbers, only they were considered the worst. Jewish people despised them more than Roman officials or soldiers. Sometimes children would come up and spit at tax collectors, encouraged to do so by their parents.
- Disgraced. By extension Levi's family would also have been ostracized by the community. He was a letdown to his family and the source of shame.
- Defiled. He was considered an outcast and was excommunicated from the synagogue. According to the Rabbis, there was no hope for a loser like Levi.

2. He summoned Levi.

After looking at Levi Jesus issued a very short command: "Follow me." This is in the present tense so He was saying something like this: "Be following me" or "Be following with me."

Alan Carr lifts a few lessons from this passage that are worth pondering:

- No one is beyond hope
- Jesus knows how to reach your wayward loved ones
- Jesus sees the hidden potential in the lives of the lost
- It's impossible to know what's happening in a person's heart

What Levi does is startling. He doesn't just put on a sweater and declare a different allegiance but instead, "He rose and followed Him." He immediately obeys. He gets up and goes. He's not just giving intellectual assent but makes a decision of his will and then moves physically.

Luke 5:28 provides some additional insight: "And leaving everything, he rose and followed him." In the original, this sentence reads this way: "And he left all, rose up, and followed him." This is amazing. Levi left everything even before he got up and went with Jesus! There needs to be a leaving before there can be a rising. He believed and then he bolted.

We read in Mark 1:18 that the fishermen left their nets. In Mark 10:50, Blind Bart threw off his cloak, "sprang up and came to Jesus." Here's a question. What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there something you're still holding on to? That may explain your lack of joy. One pastor said it like this: "The freest people are those who've learned to leave things behind." Jim Elliot is famous for saying: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose." Jesus said in Luke 9:62: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

His response was wholehearted. He totally made a break with his tax business. He didn't stoop to gather any shekels or tidy up his

books. He left it all, he got up and he followed Christ. The four fishermen could back to fishing (and they did) but for him, his work as a tax collector was now over. Someone else would quickly take his place.

A chicken and a pig were walking down the road together. They passed a sign for a local diner advertising its breakfast special: "Ham and Eggs – \$2.95!" The chicken said, "That's our whole contribution to society: breakfast food!" The pig replied, "For you, it may be a contribution. For me it's a total commitment."

Jesus really picked a motley crew of disciples, didn't He? The first four are fishermen and the fifth a tax collector. One pastor says, "I never would have considered Levi. But then, I probably wouldn't have considered you, either. Or me." There were a lot of surprised people that day. The crowd was confused. The disciples were dumbfounded. And Levi couldn't believe that Jesus was calling him.

Levi would no doubt have hit these four guys up for taxes on their fish. Can you imagine the tension on the team between these guys? When I pastored in Pontiac we had a large number of police officers and correctional officers who attended our church. These men and women would tell me that it was difficult for them when they would see someone they had arrested come to church. One time, after a new believer was baptized, one of my law enforcement friends called me and told me that he was struggling because he knew this person's past. I shared this passage with him and told him that the Lord loves to put people with different pasts on the same team!

So the first thing we must do is follow the Savior. The second thing we must do is focus on sinners.

Focus on Sinners

If you would have asked Matthew at this point if he thought Jesus could use him as an evangelist, he would have said, "That's a good one. That's funnier than a flat tax." I imagine Levi brainstorming and asking himself, "What do I do well? Let's start there." An idea comes to his mind but he blows it off. "I throw great parties but I'm a Christ-follower now. I probably shouldn't be doing that anymore."

And then it hits him: "What if I had a party with a purpose? What if all my IRS buddies came and what if I invited Jesus and the guys? What if Jesus rubbed shoulders with my irreligious friends and what if some spiritual conversations took place? That would be cool."

I see three important factors that will help us focus on sinners.

1. Express acceptance.

Look at Mark 2:15: "And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him." The word "recline" is used twice in this verse. It refers to the practice of lying on your side, leaning on your elbow, with your head by the table. It's the posture that people took when they settled in for a long and relaxed meal.

The phrase "at table" is a term of identification and friendship. In that culture when you had a meal with someone you were saying, "I accept you and identify with you." To eat from the same loaf of bread was to join yourself to the person you're eating with.

His network of friends and acquaintances are eating nachos and cheese and watching the Packers get back on track. As he looks around the room, he sees Peter talking to two publicans. Bring it on, Pete! And there's John over there – Go for it, John! And then he sees Jesus with a whole crowd of people around Him as He calls more people to follow Him. Levi was so happy he almost laughed out loud.

That night was just the beginning. Being a tax collector, he was good with a pen and paper and for the next three years he recorded what he saw and heard of Jesus. His writings became known as the Gospel of Matthew. He followed the Savior and focused on sinners. He had a heart for his lost friends and the guts to try to reach them.

Some of the most effective evangelists are brand new Christians. They still have lots of "sinners" in their life and they can't stop talking about what Jesus has done for them. Over time, zeal can evaporate, and connections with non-Christians are replaced with new friendships with Christians. In one sense, this is good and healthy and some of us do need to sever unhealthy relationships. But on the other hand, we need to make sure we don't insulate ourselves from the very people Jesus wants us to reach. That's why we talk so much about neighboring. God has put us where we live on purpose for His purposes.

I love how many of you wrote down the names of three lost people on post-it-notes last week [go up to boards]. It's very moving to know that Edgewood is filled with people who get that this is a hospital for the hurting. I can't wait until we start hearing of people on these post-it notes coming to faith in Christ. If you'd like to add any names today we've placed some post-it note pads on the front pew. Simply come up after the service and fill one out and then place on the black boards [let's pray right now for the people up here].

2. Expect opposition.

If you mix it up with the marginalized it's highly likely that you'll be criticized, often by those who are the most religious. We see this in verse 16: "And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners.'" This is the first time Mark mentions the Pharisees. They were known as separatists or literally, "the detached ones." Let's give them props for attempting to obey the laws of God but the problem was that they added a bunch of other laws to the list. The number one rule was to stay away from the unrighteous.

The grouping "tax collectors and sinners" is used three times to emphasize that the religious establishment frowned on sinners while Jesus focused on them. In their minds, the Pharisees had reached a place where they thought they were better and more righteous than others. John MacArthur writes, "The religious hated Jesus for condemning good people and they hated him for forgiving bad people."

On Tuesdays the pastoral team goes out for lunch together. This past week we ate at Arthur's. After hanging out in our holy huddle, we got up to leave and as we were headed out, we saw someone from Edgewood who was in line with three of his buddies. He waved to us and said loudly, "These are my pastors" and then he turned to the guys he was with and said, "And these are my crooks!" Later that day I called to give him props for hanging out with unholy crooks. That's what we're all supposed to do.

Notice that the Pharisees corner the disciples to express their disdain. The phrase, "eat with" can be translated as, "always eating with." Their criticism is really a compliment, isn't it? They didn't have the courage to confront Christ. Last week we pointed out the religious guys criticized Jesus in their hearts, here we see them complain to the disciples and soon they will attack Jesus to His face. It really bothered them that Jesus spent time with sinners. Jesus really gets the religious leaders worked up in Matthew 21:31 when He says, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."

Express acceptance to sinners. When you do, expect opposition. That leads to the third truth.

3. Emulate Jesus.

I love how Jesus reframes our understanding. He takes this opportunity to clarify His mission. His entire purpose was to spend time with sinners in order to bring salvation to them as seen in verse 17: "And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...'" Jesus quotes a well-known proverb to silence the Pharisees. As followers of Jesus we must keep coming back to the example of Jesus Christ. If we claim to follow the Savior we will focus on sinners.

A couple weeks ago I went to the doctor because I was feeling sick. As I looked around the waiting room it was evident that I wasn't alone. Some patients looked pale. Others were walking slowly. Many of us were coughing and sneezing. No one was smiling. We were there because we knew we were sick. This week I saw a surgeon friend when I was visiting someone in the hospital. Surgeons follow up with those who've had surgery. Listen. Hospitals aren't for healthy people. When people are sick they need a doctor. Jesus seeks sin-sick sinners. The church is meant to be a hospital for the hurting, not a palace for the perfect.

Can you imagine a hospital with a mission statement that said, "We're here for the healthy. If you're sick, stay away!" Can you imagine a church that saw as its purpose to provide a place for perfect people? Let's be clear. We exist to help the hurting, to minister to the messed up, to serve the sin-sick and to love the unlovely so that they can have their sins forgiven by the Great Physician. When I hear people say, "I don't want to come to church because it's filled with hypocrites," I often smile and say, "Why don't you join us and we'll have one more."

C.T. Studd is famous for saying, "Some wish to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a Rescue Shop within a yard of hell."

Jesus moves from an analogy to an appeal to His authority: "...I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus came to bear our burdens, to become the sacrifice for our sins, but the Pharisees forgot all about helping the hurting. Jesus lets them have it in Matthew 23:4: "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger."

The whole purpose of Jesus' coming was to save sinners. Luke 5:32 includes that He came to call sinners "to repentance." This is the essence of the gospel. The Savior came to save sinners. Paul captured this in 1 Timothy 1:15: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

In his new book called, "Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel," Russell Moore reminds us that we should never forget the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as we engage the culture. Whenever he feels himself growing discouraged about the future, he reminds himself, "the next Billy Graham might be drunk right now...the next Jonathan Edwards might be the man driving in front of you with the Darwin Fish bumper decal. The next Charles Wesley might be a profanity-spewing hip-hop artist right

now. The next Charles Spurgeon might be managing an abortion clinic right now. The next Mother Theresa might be a heroin-addict right now. The next Augustine of Hippo might be a sexually promiscuous cult member right now, just like, come to think of it, the first Augustine of Hippo was.”

The Pharisees thought of themselves as righteous so they looked down their noses at those who sinned differently than they did. To them it was scandalous that Jesus would spend time with sinners.

Action Steps

Let’s think through how we can apply this message.

1. Wholeheartedly follow the Savior

Is there something holding you back? What is it? Let it go. Now. Get up and follow. Because he left all to follow Jesus, Levi’s name was changed to Matthew, which means, “Gift of God.” Have you received the gift of salvation?

His call to you is the same as it was for Levi: “Follow Me.” It’s the call to conversion and commitment, the call to salvation and surrender. The gospel has nothing to say to those who believe they have no sins that need to be forgiven. Too many today think Christianity is just for good people. But Christ is for those who know they’re bad and realize they cannot approach a holy God on the basis of their own merit. Most of us underestimate God’s holiness and overestimate our own goodness. You’re not too bad to be saved, but you might be too good to be saved. Erwin Lutzer says, “Don’t ever diminish the cross by saying, ‘This sin is too big to be forgiven.’”

2. Intentionally focus on sinners.

Slow down so you can see the Levis around you. Look at your social calendar. Do you only hang out with holy people? Think of just one person who doesn’t know Jesus. What one thing can you do this week to spend time with him or her? Maybe you can have supper with a sinner. When Jesus prayed for his followers in John 17:15, He said, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”

When Oliver Cromwell ruled England, the nation experienced a crisis when they ran out of silver and could not mint any coins. Cromwell sent his soldiers to the Cathedral to see if any silver was available. They reported back that the only silver was in the statues of the saints, to which Cromwell replied, “Melt down the saints and get them back into circulation.”

Fellow follower, lets ask Jesus to melt us down so that we get back into circulation. If you’re saved, it’s time to shine.

Don’t be ashamed of your past
If you’re shattered like a piece of glass
The more broke you are the more the light gets through
Show your wounds and your flaws
Show them why you still need the cross
Let them see the work He’s doing in you

That even in the darkest place
His love can make you radiate

Invitation: “Glow in the Dark”

Mark 2:23-28 Liberty or Legalism

Almost every state has surprising laws on their books.

- In Florida, a woman may be fined for falling asleep under a hair dryer.
- In Indiana, citizens are not allowed to attend a movie within four hours after eating garlic. That seems like a good law to me.
- In Iowa, a man with a moustache is forbidden from kissing a woman in public.
- In Moline, ice-skating at the Riverside pond during the months of June and August is strictly prohibited.
- In Normal, Illinois, it’s against the law to make a face at a dog.
- In Wisconsin, it’s against the law to serve apple pie in restaurants unless there is cheese on top of it. Makes

perfect sense to me.

And, it's probably a good thing that I'm not a pastor in Nicholas County, West Virginia because no member of the clergy is allowed to tell jokes or humorous stories from the pulpit. Or, maybe that wouldn't apply to the humor I use...

We may laugh, or groan, at these out-of-date laws, because many of them seem absurd and ridiculous. But, if we were to list all the rules, expectations, and laws that are on the books in some churches today, chances are we'd stop laughing pretty quickly. Most of these religious regulations are not written down but some of us attempt to keep them, or expect others to do so.

Spiritual growth can be stunted, or even choked to death by the weeds of legalism. Legalism can be defined as a strict adherence to the law. Specifically, as it relates to faith, a legalist is one who believes that performance is the way to gain favor with God. Legalism is the human attempt to gain salvation or prove our spirituality by outward conformity to a list of religious "do's" and "don'ts."

Observations

Before we jump into our text, here are some observations about legalism.

1. We tend to think others are legalistic, but that we're not.

The fact is that we're all legalistic by nature. We tend to judge others by our own standards of what is acceptable and what isn't. In essence, we think our sins smell better than other people's. We have very little tolerance for people who sin differently than we do.

2. Legalism is highly contagious.

While it's usually less conscious and systematized in our minds than it was among the Pharisees, legalism can spread like a bad virus through an entire congregation.

3. Legalism can take a vibrant faith and make it dull and lifeless.

It can evaporate enthusiasm, jettison joy, and stifle spirituality. Instead of finding freedom through Christ, many believers are living with great burdens.

4. Legalism produces self-righteousness and judgment.

Majoring in guilt and misguided sacrifice, legalism urges its followers to evaluate their relationship with God on the basis of standards and scores – and expects others to do the same. Superficial spirituality short-circuits the work of grace.

5. Legalism makes us narrow and divisive.

The legalist insists that everyone live up to the standard they have adopted. In other words, everyone needs to be like me. When we think this way, we miss the delight of diversity in the church.

6. Legalism makes it impossible for people to see Jesus.

There is nothing that pushes a non-Christian away faster than a list of rules and regulations. Some of us inadvertently portray Jesus as a drill sergeant instead of a delightful Savior.

The Sabbath (our Saturday) was a big deal in the Old Testament. Did you know that at the time of Jesus, Jewish leaders had established 39 Sabbath clarifications, with each having multiple subdivisions, making for over 1500 prohibitions? Here are some of them.

- It was unlawful to kill a flea that lands on your arm because that would make you guilty of hunting on the Sabbath.
- If a man's ox fell into the ditch, he could pull it out but if a man fell in, he had to stay there.
- You could dip your radish in salt but if you left it there too long you were pickling it, and thus working. The Pharisees actually had discussions on how long it took to pickle a radish.
- You could only eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath if you killed the chicken for working on the Sabbath.
- It was OK to spit on a rock on the Sabbath, but you couldn't spit on the ground, because that made mud, and

mud was mortar, and that was work.

The Jewish Talmud, which is like a commentary that codifies and explains the intricacies of acceptable behavior, has 24 chapters of Sabbath laws. One rabbi said he spent two and a half years studying just one chapter to figure out the minutia of what could be picked up and carried on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees attacked Jesus about the Sabbath six different times in the gospels. Five of them have to do with Jesus healing on this holy day and one has to do with the behavior of the disciples.

With all that as background listen to Mark 2:23-28: "One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?' And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.'"

I'm going to borrow a three-word outline from another pastor that helps us see the flow of this narrative.

- Accusation (Mark 2:23-24)
- Answer (Mark 2:25-26)
- Application (Mark 2:27-28)

1. Accusation.

The Pharisees and other religious leaders are ramping up their accusations against Jesus. They were offended when Jesus forgave sin and they were really torqued when the disciples of Jesus weren't fasting as Pastor Tim helped us understand last week. Here's something Tim taught us: "When personal preference becomes spiritual commandment the seeds of pride produce legalism and tradition." We're to trump our traditions with the Word of God and make sure we don't lose our elasticity by holding on to our brittle categories.

Let's look a bit closer at Mark 2:23: "One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain." While there were main roads in Israel, it was quite common to cut through fields to get to where you wanted to go. While foreign to us, if you were hungry it was ok to pluck the ripe grain, rub it in your hands to break open the husks, and then eat the kernels. This wouldn't go over well today if someone cut through your backyard and stopped to pick stuff out of your garden, would it? This practice in Israel served as a public welfare system so no one would go hungry.

All of this was perfectly legit. Listen to Deuteronomy 23:25: "If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain." If you drove your John Deere combine through your neighbor's field, you might have some problems but you could eat what you wanted while you were walking. In addition, farmers were to leave grain standing in the corners after harvest so the disenfranchised could have some dinner.

Notice that the Pharisees don't attack the disciples for gorging on the grain. They don't accuse them of stealing but of harvesting and threshing, which in their minds, was working on the Sabbath. In Luke 6:11, which is a parallel passage, we read: "His disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands." Rolling the grain to remove the husks was considered sifting. Rubbing the kernel was threshing. Eating was grinding. And tossing the chaff in the air was winnowing. They're basing all this on Exodus 34:21: "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest."

While we don't read that Jesus is eating (He probably was), the Pharisees hold Jesus responsible for the behavior of his followers. This was actually a common understanding in that culture. If a rabbi's disciples did something wrong, the rabbi himself was held accountable. It's good for us to pause here and recognize that our behavior reflects either positively or negatively on the Lord as well. Look at verse 24: "And the Pharisees were saying to Him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?'"

I get the sense that these religious guys are following the followers of Jesus around, just looking to pounce on them. It's like they're playing the "Gotcha" game. We see that in the use of the word, "Look..." Notice also that their accusation is in the present tense: "were saying to him." This is not a one-time accusation but rather something they continuously repeated. They couldn't let it go. The Pharisees loved to ask "why" questions like we saw in Mark 2:16: "Why does he eat?" and in Mark 2:18: "Why do John's disciples fast?"

Serving as religious traffic cops, the Pharisees were waiting to write tickets about Sabbath-breaking. They're basically charging

them, and therefore Jesus, with breaking one of the 10 Commandments: “Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

Jesus wanted everyone to know that doing that which is good trumps Sabbath-keeping. By the way, are you picking up that Jesus purposely did things on the Sabbath in order to rile up the religious leaders? The Sabbath was intended to be a special sign between Jehovah and His covenant people. Let’s reflect on the two main purposes behind Sabbath observance in the Old Testament.

- **Rest.** The word “Sabbath” comes from sabbaton, which literally means, “A cessation from labor; to desist from exertion.” The double beta, or double B, communicates an intensive form or a complete cessation. Ligon Duncan refers to the Sabbath as “the stop-working day.”
- **Rhythm.** God set up a rhythm of work and rest; of labor and then leisure. Exodus 20:9-10: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work...But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...” In verse 11, the model for Sabbath rest is the cadence found in creation: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

2. Answer.

I love how Jesus refuses to argue with their accusation but instead appeals to Scripture to show there is biblical evidence that compassion is more important than the commandment. He’s actually rebuking them with a touch of sarcasm when He says in verse 25: “Have you never read?” He loved to answer questions with a question. This is a great model for us, isn’t it? We must always go back to the Bible. Jesus did this often. Let’s look at just two examples from Mark 12. Check out verse 10: “Have you not read this Scripture?” In verse 26, He exposes the Sadducees: “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”

In Mark 2:25-26, Jesus takes them back to an incident found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6: “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?”

Jesus is appealing to David, who is someone who they certainly respect and honor. King Saul was pursuing David (Jesus is in the line of David and is being pursued by the Pharisees) and David’s companions are hungry (David had “disciples” who were also looking for food). David asks a priest for some help and is told that the only bread is the holy bread, also called the Showbread, or the “Bread of the Presence.”

This showbread was 12 loaves of bread, to represent the 12 tribes of Israel, that were baked fresh every Sabbath Day (note that this would have been considered “work” by the Pharisees). The loaves were placed on a table in the holy place in the Tabernacle to remind Israel of the Lord’s presence and their dependence on Him for their daily bread. This bread was replaced every Sabbath and the old bread was eaten by the priests. Leviticus 24:9 says that no one was allowed to eat this bread except for Aaron’s descendants who served as priests. But in this case, the priest gave David and his hungry men this bread.

Here’s the principal. Human needs transcend religious rituals. There are times when human needs are more important than a legalistic keeping of the Law. Here’s the argument. If David and his disciples were allowed to violate a rule, then the greater David could allow his disciples to violate an unbiblical regulation on the Sabbath. It’s really an argument from the greater to the lesser. In David’s case, it was not the mere question of picking some grain but the more serious charge of eating the Bread of the Presence. The point is that even though it was theoretically illegal, God didn’t rebuke David. Therefore, how much more is it OK for Jesus’ disciples to eat though they were not breaking the Law?

Listen. God is more concerned with meeting people’s needs than He is with protecting traditions. In Matthew’s reporting of this account, Jesus’ heart of mercy and compassion come to the surface. Listen to Matthew 12:7: “If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.” Love for others is more important than legalistic obstinacy.

Here are two examples that come to mind. What would you think if a young man wore a hat in church? How many of you would be bothered by that? Would you think he was being disrespectful? Would it be easier to give grace if you found out that he has alopecia, and was embarrassed because all of his hair was falling out? Would it then be OK with you if he wore a hat? This is an actual example that took place right here in our building about three weeks ago. Ritualistic rules can crush compassion. Human needs transcend religious rituals.

The other example is more personal and embarrassing but I’ll share it anyway. I was preaching in our previous church one Sunday when I noticed a teenager up in our balcony texting on her phone during the entire sermon. I found myself getting upset even while I

was preaching. I couldn't believe how rude she was being. It made me want to call her out but I held my tongue.

After the service I made my way over to her, ready to tell her what I thought of her tenacious texting during my amazing sermon. Just before I corrected her, I overheard her tell someone that she was really bummed out that her friend didn't come to church that morning. When she realized that her friend wasn't going to make it, she decided to text the sermon in real time to her. I was busted. She was helping a friend learn about Jesus while I was being judgmental and legalistic. Human needs transcend religious rituals.

I heard someone say that as we get older, we have to guard against the hardening of our categories.

3. Application.

After their accusation, Jesus gives an answer and then concludes with two applications.

- The Sabbath was given to serve us. In verse 27, Jesus cuts through the religious rules and rituals to the reason behind the giving of the Sabbath: "And He said [this is also in the imperfect tense so it reads, "He was continuing to say"] to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'" So, here's a question. Which came first, man or the Sabbath? Man was made on the sixth day; Sabbath came on the seventh. In my research this week I learned that some rabbis actually taught that humans were created in order to keep the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was given to people out of the grace of God. It was designed to be a blessing, not something to hold us in bondage. We could say that the Sabbath was given to serve man, not something that we must serve. This day of rest was to be a time of refreshment not a day of restriction; not a duty, but a delight. Unfortunately, because the religious leaders had added a bunch of laws and rules and regulations to it, it had become burdensome.

In the very next chapter, Jesus asks a question that no doubt unsettled the religious guys in verse 4: "And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent." Here's a helpful question to ask so see if any religious rules or legalistic limitations have taken root in your life: Is this practice a benefit or is it leading to bondage?

- Serve the one who is Sovereign over the Sabbath. We see this in verse 28: "So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." The title "Son of Man" is messianic, meaning it was used of the Anointed One, the coming one, to free God's people. The Pharisees would have recognized what Jesus was saying. But just in case they didn't get it, Jesus boldly refers to Himself as "Lord of the Sabbath." Jesus is declaring Himself as Sovereign God. The title "Lord" refers to one to whom all things belong, like an owner. Jesus has authority over the Sabbath because He is the Almighty God. In Matthew 12:6, the parallel passage, Jesus puts it this way: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here."

Tim Keller says, "His self-awareness is startling. No other human teacher has made anything like the claim He makes." Jesus is Sovereign over the Sabbath. He owns it and redefines its purpose. It is far more important to have a relationship with Him than to follow a bunch of rules and regulations. When Jesus says He is the Lord of the Sabbath, He is the Sabbath. He has authority over the Sabbath and over everything and everyone. That means the disciples can do whatever He directs them to do.

After healing a man on the Sabbath who had been an invalid for 38 years, the Pharisees were furious with Jesus. They knew that He was declaring His sovereignty over the Sabbath and it really bothered them. We see this clearly in John 5:18: "For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Salvation Rest

Jesus is the only way to have rest because Sabbath is all about rest. Instead of busily following a list of legalistic rules and working to be accepted by God, it's time to believe and rest in your acceptance. Check out Hebrews 4:1-3: "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. Now we who have believed enter that rest..."

The promise of a temporary Sabbath rest, or entering Canaan, was really a picture of the eternal rest that Christ provides. Once we put our faith in Christ and believe in Him, we will find the only rest that can satisfy our souls.

Hebrews 4:9-11: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience."

Have you received that rest or are you banking on a list of burdensome rules? When it comes to heaven, you only have two options.

1. You can try to work your way in, which will never work.
2. Or you get in by the work of another. We must rest from all efforts to be saved by our own works because in Christ we find a total rest.

Look at it this way. Rest is all about satisfaction and completion.

- God the Father finished His work of creation and then rested in Genesis 2:2. He was so satisfied with His work that He could sit back and declare: "It is good."
- Jesus completed His work when He said, "It is Finished" in John 19:30.
- We can only find satisfaction when we rest in the work that has been finished for us on the cross.

Jesus said this in Matthew 11:28-29: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

It's time to stop striving and to cease trying to measure up to God's standards. Its time to enter His salvation rest right now.

Action Steps

1. Receive the rest that only Christ can give you.

If you persist in working, if you feel like you just have to do something, then ponder these words from Jesus in John 6:29: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

2. Submit to the Sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

If you haven't fully surrendered, it's time to do so.

3. Set apart a day for worship.

The principle behind Sabbath is to take a day to establish rhythm, rest, recalibration, refreshment and renewal.

4. Put love over legalism.

One way to do that is by giving to the Mobile Ultrasound Project. You could go into a legalistic mode and say something like this, "Those who get pregnant outside of marriage deserve what happened to them because of their sin." Or you could operate out of mercy for those in need, knowing that love transcends legalism.

5. Invite your friends and neighbors and family members to our December series called, "Christmas B.C."

Closing Song: "God You Reign"

Mark 3:1-6

Withered Lives

Did you hear about the Easter Egg Hunt that went south last weekend in Connecticut? The PEZ Candy company (I love that candy) sponsored an Easter Egg hunt but had to abruptly shut it down in the middle of it because parents were misbehaving. One headline captured the chaos: "Adults swarm PEZ Easter egg hunt 'like locusts,' ruining it for kids." Many moms and dads were shoving and tackling kids as young as four-years-old in order to get more eggs. These same parents got mad at PEZ for cancelling it and took to social media to complain, while PEZ blames out-of-control parents for having to cancel it. I wonder how the children feel? It's all a matter of perspective, isn't it?

I love the perspective that children have on things. What a joy to see so many children attend our Rise Up With Jesus program

during our Comeback Easter services. Suzy Crosby is doing a super job providing leadership for our nursery ministry and Sheila Kuriscak and her team really stepped it up for Easter. Children were able to hear from the perspective of a maid (played by Chasity Holmquist) cleaning up after the last supper, saw how Jesus suffered on the cross, they went into the empty tomb, they heard about the resurrection, and they received the gospel message from Marie Guyton. And at the end, they received eggs filled with candy...and no parents stole any though I'm sure some bags were pilfered out in the parking lot.

Perspective is important in almost everything. More than 1500 people attended our five services and 18 individuals raised their hands last weekend to indicate that they received Jesus Christ as their Savior. Many others rededicated their lives to Christ. The staff contacted over 50 Easter guests this past week. I loved hearing what one guest said to me when I called: "The service was way more than I expected. My whole perspective on Christianity and what it means to follow Jesus has changed."

One's perception and perspective is paramount. Let me illustrate by giving summaries of two actual news events.

- 4 people were killed in another part of the world last month
- A suicide bomber killed over 70 on Sunday

Now, here are these same stories from a different, more accurate perspective.

- 4 Bible translators were martyred in the Middle East
- A terrorist in Pakistan purposely targeted Christians on Easter Sunday, killing over 70 believers celebrating the resurrection.

If you want to learn more about how Christians are being persecuted around the world, visit Voice of the Martyrs at persecution.com.

Grab your Bibles because we're going to approach our passage in Mark 3:1-6 from three different perspectives.

- First, from the view of a humble-hearted man.
- Second, through the lenses of some hard-hearted religious guys.
- Third, from the perspective of the holy heart of our Savior.

Please stand as I read our passage:

"Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come here.' 4 And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him."

I'm excited to be back in the Gospel of Mark. We took a break for our Christmas B.C. series and our Metaphors of the Messiah series. We'll camp in this glorious book through the end of summer. Before we dive in, I want to let you know about two things.

- The deacons and pastoral team have been interviewing Kyle Parks for our Youth and Young Adults Pastor position. We are very excited about the possibilities and have invited him and his wife Liesl to Edgewood April 29 through May 2. We'll let you know more as we move forward.
- John and Tiffany Markum and their children will be here next weekend. John was a pastor here for 5 years and is now the lead pastor for Life City Church in San Jose. I will be interviewing him in the weekend services. He'll be teaching in Ignite on Sunday morning and then will be sharing more details next Sunday night at 6:00 p.m. There will be a luncheon for the Markum family next Sunday after the 10:45 service. Please sign up on our connection card.

As we turn to the third chapter of Mark, the tension has been building between the religious establishment and Jesus. In chapter two, they were angry because Jesus forgave a man's sins, He ate supper with sinners, He refused to honor their rituals and He allowed His disciples to pick and eat grain on the Sabbath. The religious leaders are upset and are looking to trap Jesus in something. The Pharisees are not playing fair, you see (see what I did there?).

As we go through this passage, let's ask ourselves this question: "Is my heart humble, hard, or holy?"

1. A humble heart.

Let's first view this incident through the eyes of a man with a lot of humility. He has a withered hand and a worshipping heart. While some commentators believe the Pharisees planted him in the synagogue to set Jesus up, it seems more likely that he was there on

a regular basis. I see three things in him.

- He was in the right place. Verse 1 says that Jesus entered the synagogue, “and a man was there with a withered hand.” Even though he was going through a challenging time, that didn’t keep him from gathering with God’s people. That’s a good word for us. Our tendency when we go through trials is to pull away from God and from believers. That’s not good. What I’ve observed over the years is that when people unplug they tend to unravel.

The word “withered” means, “to dry up and become paralyzed.” This same word was used of a plant that had died. Luke tells us that it was his right hand, which means that he was not able to do any kind of physical labor. The Greek tells us that his hand had become withered, either through an accident or disease.

- He obeyed. Drop down to verse 3. Jesus said to him, “Come here.” The word “come” has the idea of motion; he got up and came to Jesus. Luke 6:8 includes additional detail: “‘Come and stand here.’ And he rose and stood there.” This literally means, “Up! Rise into the middle.” Jesus didn’t want anyone to miss what He was about to do. My guess is that he didn’t really want to stand up in the middle of everyone. He was probably self-conscious. And yet, maybe his heart was beating a bit faster as he wondered what Jesus was going to do for his withered hand. Maybe he was both embarrassed and excited. Have you ever felt like that? Almost everyone who gets baptized experiences both extremes. Jesus wants to put Himself on display in your life so He wants you to stand up and to stand out for Him.

- He exhibited extreme faith. In verse 5, Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” I’m sure that wasn’t easy for him as he was no doubt accustomed to not using that hand. But this was a command of Jesus Christ and so we read next: “He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.” The word “restored” means, “to be back again.” This reminds me of the man who was an invalid in John 5:8-9: “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.”

Is your heart humble today?

2. A hard heart.

We move now from the humble-hearted man to some hard-hearted men. Instead of being compassionate toward the man with the withered hand, they are looking for ways to clobber Christ. I see three things that hard-hearted people do.

- They find fault in others. Look at verse 2: “And they watched Jesus, to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.” The word “watched” has the idea of being extremely attentive and the tense tells us that they “kept on watching, by the side of.” These guys, unlike back-row Baptists, always sat in the front seats so everyone could see them. The front row seats were the seats of honor. The picture is of them watching His every move and listening attentively to everything He said.

Have you ever known someone who loves to play, “Gotcha” with you? As soon as you say or do something wrong they say, “Aha. I caught you.” It’s like Roz from Monsters, Inc. who says to Mike, “I’m watching you, Wazowski. Always watching. Always.” We see this in Luke 11:53-54: “The scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.”

Notice that they aim to “accuse” or condemn Jesus. They wanted to bring a formal charge against Him. Specifically, they are looking for Him to do something that would break the Sabbath law and they are ready to serve as the required witnesses so He can be sentenced to death according to Deuteronomy 19:15. I’m reminded of Psalm 37:32: “The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death.” What a contrast with the man with a withered hand. He came to worship while the wicked came to watch.

- They won’t admit wrong. Hard-hearted people find fault in others and won’t admit their own wrongdoing. Jesus turns the tables on them and asks a question that they refuse to answer in verse 4: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” By asking if it’s “lawful,” Jesus is taking them back to the Bible, not their rules or rituals. He’s trying to get them to answer this out loud but they won’t do it because it will contradict their own teaching. In the parallel account in Matthew 12:11-12, Jesus expands the question which no doubt makes them very uncomfortable: “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

In response to all this, Mark 3:4 says, “But they were silent,” which means, “to be hushed or mute.” It was used of the demons in Mark 1:25. Jesus shut the mouths of spirit beings and silenced human beings who attacked Him.

Friends, when we’re face-to-face with God, there is really nothing we can say to justify or explain ourselves, is there? I’m reminded of what Job said after questioning and complaining. After God speaks, Job responds by saying in Job 40:4-5: “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”

- They get others to pile on. After Jesus heals the man, verse 6 says, “The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.” Luke adds, “they were filled with fury.” Some background is helpful here. The Pharisees saw themselves as the religious role models and the spiritual gatekeepers of Israel. They resented the Romans ruling over them. But get this. They immediately huddle up with the Herodians, who were secular Jews who didn’t care at all about religion. They were loyal to one of Herod the Great’s sons, who was ruling in Galilee. They liked having the Romans in charge because they brought order.

This is crazy because these two groups had nothing in common. They hated each other. The word Pharisee means, “separatist” and yet they are willing to work closely with those whom they despise so they could destroy Jesus. They were on the opposite sides of every issue. But now they find common ground in their hatred of Jesus Christ. Maybe the Pharisees were thinking that since Herod put John the Baptist to death, the followers of Herod could figure out a way to kill Jesus. This hatred toward Christ continues today and explains why terrorist groups are targeting Christians.

Notice that they get together to “destroy him,” which means, “to utterly do away with a person or thing.” It’s ironic that Herod himself, after Jesus was born, according to Matthew 2:13 was “about to search for the child, to destroy him.” What Herod couldn’t do, the Herodians and Pharisees are intent to finish. Incidentally, this is Mark’s first explicit reference to the death of Jesus. There’s a lot of hypocrisy on display here. These guys are upset that Jesus healed on the Sabbath but they are plotting murder on the same day.

It’s dangerous to have a hard heart.

- If you’re not saved, every time you refuse to receive Christ, your heart gets more hardened. Psalm 95:8: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”

- If you’re saved and you no longer are grieved by sin, you can end up grieving the Holy Spirit as stated in Ephesians 4:30: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Don’t let your conscience become calloused.

Do you have a hard heart?

3. A holy heart.

We’ve observed a humble heart and we’ve also seen some hard hearts. Let’s look now at the holy heart of Jesus from verse Mark 3:5. Three things jump out at me.

(1) Jesus looks around.

We see this in the beginning of verse 5: “And He looked around at them...” This means that he looked around with a “penetrating gaze.” Can you imagine what this must have felt like to have Jesus gaze into your soul? [Demonstrate this] John 2:25 says, “...he himself knew what was in man.” So here’s a question. When Jesus looks at you, what does He see? I love 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.”

(2) Jesus gets angry.

When Jesus looked around, He did so “with anger.” This word was used of sap rising in a tree as it builds and builds. It also means “wrath.” This is the only explicit reference to the anger of Jesus in the gospels, though we know He was angry on other occasions. It’s important to remember that in the gospels Jesus is never angry with sinners or tax collectors or prostitutes but rather his anger is unleashed on the legalistic leaders. To read more about this, see Matthew 23 where He pronounces seven woes upon the Scribes and Pharisees.

We don’t think enough about the wrath of God today. In Psalm 95:10 God says, “For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.’ Therefore I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.” In Revelation 6:15-17, we see what lies ahead for the lost as they: “hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” Aren’t you glad that while Jesus gets angry, He doesn’t stay angry? We know that because the aorist tense is used, which shows that His anger is momentary.

(3) Jesus gets grieved.

We see next that Jesus is “grieved.” Here we see the present tense, meaning that He is continually “grieving.” He feels pain and sorrow. Jesus is mad and He is sad; He is angry and He is afflicted. Isaiah 53:3 says that He is “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” In Matthew 23:37, Jesus is greatly grieved as He considers the hard hearts of those in Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children

together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" And another occasion when Jerusalem comes into view, Luke 19:41 says that Jesus "wept over it."

Jesus laments because He loves people. This is captured clearly in Mark 10 when He challenges the rich young ruler to give up his idols and his self-righteous rule keeping. Check out verse 21: "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have...and come, follow me.'"

What is it that makes Jesus get angry and grieved? Listen. There's something far worse than a withered hand; it's a withered heart. To the Pharisees, the man with a withered hand was just a pawn; to Jesus He was a person made in the image of God. Their legalism had eroded their love leading them to have "hardness of heart." This describes someone who willingly and repeatedly refuses to repent and receive Jesus Christ. The word "hardening" is a present process and literally means, "callous and insensitive." It was used to describe marble. Hard hearts break Jesus' heart. We can go all the way back to Genesis 6:6 to hear some shocking words from the Lord: "And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart."

So, what kind of heart do you have today? Do you have a humble heart? Is your heart hard? Is your heart growing in holiness? Here are a few ways to apply what we've learned today.

Action Steps

1. We should be angry about sin.

The Bible says that we're to be angry in a righteous kind of way. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be angry and do not sin." When you see a child abused you should be angry. When you hear about abortion it should make you mad. We should be angry about evil and how our culture is sliding south. There's a place for holy indignation.

But we also need to be very careful. I like what Tim Challies says about righteous anger:

"Does God allow his people to express anger? Yes, he does. But only under these circumstances: You are reacting against actual sin, you are more concerned with the offense against God than the offense against yourself, and you are expressing your anger in ways consistent with Christian character."

And I would add that most of us could stand to be angrier about our own sins instead of covering them up or excusing them or cozying up to them.

2. It's even better to grieve greatly about sin.

I've been asking God to break me and make me weep more, especially for my own sins. It's working because I cry all the time. I don't want to just get mad; I also want to get sad about sin. Here's a good prayer to pray: "Lord, break my heart with the things that break your heart." Psalm 119:136: "My eyes shed streams of tears because people do not keep your law!" I long for the kind of heart Paul had for the lost as seen in Romans 9:2 and 10:1: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved."

3. It's important to work hard to keep your heart humble.

James 4:8: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Men, if you've not registered for Iron Sharpens Iron yet, can I encourage you to do so? God is looking for humble men, for tender warriors who will live on mission for Him, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our community and in the workplace. We're hoping for 100 men to go on April 16 – 79 have already signed up!

4. Remember what Jesus did for you.

As a way to change our perspective on everything, we're going to end by celebrating communion. We see the wrath of God poured out on the cross and we also see His mercy. He's a wrathful God because He is just and He grieves when people don't believe because He's merciful. God's wrath is fully satisfied and His love is fully demonstrated. How can we have hard hearts when He's done so much for us?

1 Corinthians 11:27-28 says, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

I want to lead us in a guided time of prayer. Here are some questions to ponder as we prepare our hearts.

- What are you doing right now that grieves Jesus? Confess it before Him.
- Honestly assess what kind of heart you have – is it humble, hard or holy?

- As you look at the lost around you, ask God to give you tears for them. Pray this, “God, break my heart with the things that break your heart.”
- Let’s thank Him now for His sacrifice on the cross.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Table Manners

- For believers only
- Don’t have to be a member
- Process of distribution

Closing Song: Let’s stand and sing “At the Cross: Love Ran Red”

Mark 3:7-19 **From Fans to Followers**

What do you think of large crowds?

- A record crowd of 170,000 watched the Kentucky Derby in 2015.
- Over 115,000 fans gathered to watch Michigan play Notre Dame in 2013.
- 3.5 million attended the largest ever rock concert in 1994.
- The largest religious crowd on record was when 30 million Hindus gathered to bathe in a river in the hopes of having their sins washed away.

The definition of a crowd helps explain why some of us shy away from them: “A large number of people gathered together, typically in a disorganized or unruly way.” Synonyms include: throng, horde, mass, multitude, pack, mob, and rabble.

Jesus drew a lot of crowds. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark alone, the word “crowd” appears 34 different times.

Check out Mark 3:7-9 where we see the word used three times: “Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him.”

Last week we viewed the opening verses of Mark 3 through the perspective of a humble-hearted man, through the lenses of some hard-hearted religious dudes, and from the view of the holy heart of Jesus. We paused and asked ourselves if our hearts are humble, hard or holy.

After experiencing intense opposition in the synagogue, Jesus now withdraws with his disciples, something he did 11 different times in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 6:32 is an example: “And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.” In this instance, as well as in our passage today, the crowds pressed in on Jesus, thus keeping the disciples from having some quiet time with Christ.

Twice we see the crowd described as “great,” which means, “much, many, a multitude.” People traveled great distances to be with Jesus – some lived nearby (Galilee) but others traveled for days (Judea and Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon), and weeks (Idumea and beyond the Jordan) to get there. Interestingly, Idumea is where the descendants of Esau lived. Historically, the Edomites were the archenemies of Israel and were known to be wicked and rebellious. It’s cool that people that far away, both geographically and spiritually, were drawn to Jesus. So many people came to Christ that He used a boat as his pulpit so that they wouldn’t “crush him,” which means, “to press together, and afflict.”

We see from Mark 3:10-12 that Jesus did two main things when ministering to the crowds:

- He healed many with diseases.

Look at Mark 3:10: "For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him." Sick people were smothering the Savior. We see this from the phrase, "pressed around," which means "to throw oneself upon, to jostle."

- He freed many with demons.

Check out Mark 3:11-12: "And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' And he strictly charged them not to make him known." The diseased pressed around Him and the demonized "fell down before him." This is a repeated action, which means that they "kept on falling down." This shows the power of Christ. When they confessed who He was, He silenced them. He did that for two reasons. First, there was a common belief that the knowledge of one's precise name conferred mastery over that person. By stating his title, the demons tried to show that they were superior. That didn't work out so well for them. The second reason Christ quieted them was because He didn't want or need testimony from them – He didn't want to be associated in any way with unclean spirits. We'll learn more about this next weekend when we look at the unpardonable sin.

We know from Mark 6:34 that Jesus didn't dislike crowds but rather had compassion on them: "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." While he cared for the crowds, His heart was that individual people would come to Him. We see this in Mark 8:34: "And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

In our world of social media, it's easy to find "friends" or be a "fan" on Facebook or get "followers" on Twitter and Instagram. What we see in this passage is much deeper than a cursory connection on social media platforms.

Here's our main idea today: Jesus doesn't want you to be a fickle fan but to become a faithful follower. One pastor uses concentric circles to show how Jesus wants us to move from the community to the crowd to the congregation to the committed to the core. Where would you put yourself on this chart?

It's easy for us to count a crowd but much more difficult to count converts. I'm trying to focus less on decisions for Christ and more on making disciples of Christ. I want to see movement from the community to the crowd to the congregation to the committed to the core, who then go back out to reach the community. Are you moving from gathering to growing to giving to going with the gospel? It's really not about our seating capacity but rather our sending capacity.

Are you a fickle fan or a faithful follower?

I like to ponder these words on a regular basis from Kyle Idleman in his book called, *Not a Fan*.

"It may seem that there are many followers of Jesus, but if they were honestly to define the relationship they have with him I am not sure it would be accurate to describe them as followers. It seems to me that there is a more suitable word to describe them. They are not followers of Jesus. They are fans of Jesus...My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following him. [One of the] biggest threats to the church today [are] fans that call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them...One of the reasons our churches can become fan factories is that we have separated the message of 'believe' from the message 'follow'."

In the rest of our passage we're going to see the process Jesus uses to move people from being fickle fans to faithful followers.

In Mark 3:7, Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea and the crowds came and clamored for Him. In verse 13 we see that "he went up on a mountain, called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him." Hiking up a mountain would remind people of when Moses went up the mountain to select his leaders in Exodus 24. The mountain motif speaks of both revelation and redemption in the Bible. Luke 6:12 tells us that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before he "called to him those whom he desired." This shows the importance of protracted prayer before big decisions.

It's interesting to note that the way it usually worked was that men would attach themselves to a teacher, like John the Baptist's disciples did, but here we see that Jesus deliberately chose and called to Him those whom he wanted. I love how quickly they

responded. He called...and they came! Oh, that we would come as quickly. We must also remember that unless we're called, we won't come as stated in John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." We don't really choose Him; He chooses us. John 15:16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..."

The Ministry Model of Jesus

Let's look now at the three-part strategy that Jesus uses to turn fickle fans into faithful followers. Notice Mark 3:14: "And he appointed twelve (whom He also called apostles)..." The word "appointed" means "to make," which shows that His plan is to mold and make us into the messengers He desires us to be. The number 12 is used 22 times in Revelation alone and refers to governmental perfection. More specifically the use of 12 apostles would have clearly communicated that Jesus was bridging from the 12 tribes of Israel to something brand new. Matthew 19:28 says, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel..." He is all about doing a new thing, using a new form, to build a new community, called the church.

Jesus wants to move you from being a fickle fan to a faithful follower. I see three key characteristics of faithful followers in Mark 3:14-15.

1. Be in the presence of Jesus.

The very first thing we are called to do is to spend time with Jesus: "...so that they might be with him." Jesus desires His followers to hang out with Him. In a world of "do," Jesus wants us to first "be." When we're with Him, we learn how He loves and how He handles people and what His priorities are. This is the essence of Jesus' training program. There are no huge manuals filled with rules and regulations. He's all about us living in relationship with Him.

Let's ponder something that is both simple and startling: You are as close to Christ as you want to be. It's simple because it makes sense but it's startling because sometimes we think that there's something keeping us from being close to Christ. Jason Crosby puts it like this: "God will take you as deep with Him as you want to go." You and I must take responsibility for growing in our relationship with Christ. We've said it before but it bears repeating: You won't grow in discipleship without practicing the disciplines because spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic. Proverbs 13:4: "The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied."

Can I encourage you to go deep with Christ? Spend time with Him in prayer and reading His Word every day. I've been reading several chapters from the Gospel of Mark every day since January 1st. My goal is to read the entire Gospel 20 times. I'm doing this not just so I can check off a box but so I can get to know Jesus better. What's your plan to be in the presence of Jesus and to practice His presence throughout the day? If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time.

Listen. When you spend time in the presence of Jesus, people will notice. Acts 4:13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

2. Go and proclaim Jesus.

First, we're to come and be with Jesus and second, we're to go with the gospel to others. We must be in the presence of Jesus and then we must go and proclaim Jesus. Look at the next phrase of verse 14: "...and He might send them out to preach." The words "send them out" make up the root for the word "apostle." An apostle is a "sent one." One of the churches in the Quad Cities challenges their members to "live sent." I like that. That's what we're trying to do by keeping our "Go" value in front of everyone. We gather, we grow, and we give so that we can go with the gospel. The word "preach" means to, "act as a herald, to sound forth the message of the king."

There are four ways we can respond to an increasingly evil world.

1. Isolate. At times in church history, the world was so wicked that some believers retreated to monasteries.
2. Insulate. It's not easy to isolate so some people choose to insulate themselves from the problems and pain of those who don't yet know Christ. These people spend almost all their time with other Christians and when they do have conversations about lost people their words are often judgmental. One of my pastor friends put it like this: We have to stop thinking "us vs. them" and move toward "us for them."
3. Imitate. I'm afraid this is where the majority of believers end up. When we don't spend time with Jesus we can end up blending

in with those who don't know Jesus. This person just wants to fit in and ends up caving into the culture.

4. Infiltrate. This is the heart of Jesus. We must break down barriers and build bridges with those who don't yet know Christ by proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost.

In our increasingly secular society, it is becoming more difficult to share our faith. According to a brand new book by David Kinnaman called, *Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme*, 60% of Americans believe that if you try to convert somebody you are an extremist. That's a challenge, isn't it? Are you willing to be labeled an extremist for simply sharing Jesus with others?

John and Tiffany Markum and a team from Edgewood moved to San Jose three years ago to plant a church. They are truly living in an area that sees Christians as irrelevant and even extremist. Pastor John was on staff here for five years and they are back with us this weekend. Let's show our appreciation to them as John comes up.

1. What are some ways that LifeCity Church has embraced the value of going and proclaiming Jesus to the Silicon Valley?
2. Could you share a highlight from these past three years?
3. What's one of the unique challenges you're facing right now?

Pastor John will be preaching Sunday night at 6:00 p.m. I hope you'll come and hear more about what God is doing in and through LifeCity church.

I read a post this week by Micah Fries that was quite challenging. Here's part of what he wrote:

"Research has found only 25% of churchgoers have shared their faith once or twice over the last six months. The Evangelical church can claim to be an evangelistic people - a church on mission - but the behavior betrays their belief. The facts are in and it is clear, the church has a behavior problem that is fueled by a belief problem."

Here are some simple suggestions to help us grow in our go value.

- Do something. Begin praying and then start sharing. I like what D.L. Moody said when someone complained about the way he shared his faith: "I like the way I do evangelism better than the way you don't do evangelism."
- Start small. As the weather warms up (eventually), make a renewed effort to get to know your neighbors. Go on walks in your neighborhood. Hang out in the front of your house and not in your backyard. Intentionally pour into your family members. I like the first thing Pastor Tim wrote on his April monthly report: "Took a week's vacation to start discipling my newest grandchildren."
- Use resources. One of my favorite things is to put gospel resources in your hands and to watch you share them with lost people. Thanks to some generous people, we have free copies of *Anchor for the Soul* by Ray Pritchard, *How Good is Good Enough* by Andy Stanley, a booklet called *Soul Satisfaction* and some brand new copies of *If I Believe, Why Do I Doubt* by Ray Pritchard. They're available on the round table in the lobby. Related to this, I love that over 20 students went to the Dare2Share evangelism conference this weekend.
- Celebrate successes. Share with others when you're able to have a gospel conversation. Rejoice when God saves someone. That's why we make such a big deal about baptisms – there are four coming up in the next several weeks. That's also why we shared 10 different testimonies at our Comeback Easter services.

First, be in the presence of Jesus and second, go and proclaim Jesus. That leads to the third element of the Savior's strategy.

3. Use the power of Jesus.

When proclaiming the gospel, it's critical to not do so in your own strength and abilities as stated in verse 15: "and have authority to cast out demons." The word "authority" has the idea of having delegated authority, permission to use power.

I'm reminded of Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This was certainly evident in the early church as seen in Acts 4:33: "And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." Are we seeing this kind of power today? If not, there's a short-circuit somewhere.

I'm reminded that whenever we are in the presence of Jesus and whenever we go and proclaim the gospel of Jesus, Satan and his demons go crazy. I won't go into a lot of details but the days before Easter in my life were filled with spiritual warfare and the time

since has been a battle as well. I'm thankful that I woke up Thursday morning with a renewed sense of the authority I have in Christ to overcome the evil one.

I think I know what some of you are thinking right now. You believe that you're not qualified enough to be used by Jesus. I like how one pastor put it: "Jacob was a cheater, Peter had a temper, David had an affair, Noah got drunk, Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure, Miriam was a gossip, Martha was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter, Sara was impatient, Elijah was moody, Moses stuttered, Abraham was old...and Lazarus was dead. God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the CALLED!"

In Mark 3:16-19, we're introduced to the guys He called to join His team: "He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

This list is not haphazard or without meaning. Please don't tune out like many of us do when we're slugging through the list of names in the Book of Numbers. Here are some observations that I think you will find encouraging:

- Peter is always first on the 4 different lists found in the New Testament. His name means Rock and is thought of as the leader, even though he failed and bailed on Jesus.
- James and John are the next two, and along with Peter, they make up the inner circle. They are given the name "Boanerges," which means Sons of Thunder. That was either a compliment because they had booming voices that were good for preaching or more likely it referred to their impetuosity when they later wanted to call fire down from heaven on the Samaritans in Luke 9:54. They were also prone to selfishness as seen in Mark 10:35-39 when they were positioning for some power slots in Christ's cabinet.
- While we know a lot about the first three and a little bit more about the next three, we don't know much at all about half of them. They were just ordinary guys who were insignificant and imperfect.
- This was a motley crew, made up of misfits. It's fair to say that none of them would have been voted as "most likely to succeed" by their yearbook committees. There are no rabbis or professional theologians or refined guys from Jerusalem on the list.
- They were all young twenty-something men. This is a good reminder for us older guys to make sure we're pouring into the next generation. They were the first century millennials. That's why I'm so glad that we are hiring a Youth and Young Adults pastor! Kyle Parks and his wife Liesl will be with us in three weeks. A letter just went out to members with more information. I'm also thrilled that almost 100 men have signed up for the Iron Sharpens Iron Conference this Saturday and am thrilled that 30 millennials are going!
- Many of the names are listed in pairs, which is precursor to how Jesus later will send them out two-by-two on missionary journeys as seen in Mark 6:7. BTW, I'm thrilled that 19 people will be going to Puerto Rico this summer.
- There are pairs of brothers on the list. This reminds us of the importance of family connections and the intentionality of sibling serving, not sibling rivalry. If you have a sibling, have you ever thought about how you can serve together?
- There was natural tension on this team. There were four foul-smelling fisherman, a doubter and a betrayer huddled up with Jesus. How do you think Matthew the tax collector who worked for Rome and Simon the Zealot who hated Rome got along? This reminds me that we can't pick our natural family or our spiritual family. Guess what? We're stuck with each other so we might as well learn how to serve alongside one another.

Imagine what the resumes of the twelve disciples would have sounded like to a search firm.

Dear Sir: Most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory. We wish you every success in your new venture.

Listen. If Jesus can use a rag tag team like this to turn the world upside down, can't He use you and me? And He will, if we fully surrender to Him. Jesus doesn't want you to be a fickle fan but to become a faithful follower.

No Other Plan

A legend recounts what happened when Jesus returned to heaven after his time on earth. The angel Gabriel approached Him and said, "Master, you must have suffered terribly for men down there."

"I did," Jesus replied.

"And," continued Gabriel, "do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?"

"Oh, no," said Jesus, "not yet. Right now only a few people in Galilee know."

Gabriel was perplexed and questioned, "Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them?"

Jesus said, "I've asked Peter, James, John, and a few of my friends to tell other people about me. Those who are told will in turn tell others and my story will be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Ultimately, all of mankind will hear about my life and what I have done."

Gabriel frowned and looked rather skeptical. He knew full well what humans were made of. "Yes," he said, "but what if Peter and James and John grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget? What if way down in the twenty-first century, people just don't tell others about you? What then? Haven't you made any other plans?"

And Jesus answered, "I haven't made any other plans. I'm counting on them."

Twenty centuries later, he still has no other plan. He is counting on us.

Fans will never accomplish this. Only followers will. Are you a fan or a follower?

Men and women are His method. His plan is people like you...and like me.

1. Be in the presence of Jesus
2. Go and proclaim Jesus
3. Use the power of Jesus

When Jesus considers a crowd like this, He is calling individuals to move from being fickle fans to faithful followers. Are you ready to follow?

Closing Song: "I Will Follow"

Mark 3:20-30

The Unforgivable Sin

A couple weeks ago when the pastoral team was out for our Tuesday lunch, I jokingly told Pastor Tim that I thought I was going to take a sick day today because our preaching text is a tough one. When I asked him if he would cover for me, he just smiled and said, "No problem." He asked what the topic was and I told him that it's the unforgivable sin. He then wanted to know what I thought it was. Now it was my turn to smile: "The unforgivable sin is not liking cheese curds, brats or the Green Bay Packers." To which he replied, "Then, I guess a bunch of us will be facing judgment."

While that might be funny, our topic for today is no laughing matter.

Let me tell you about a man I knew from one of the previous places we lived. I'm going to call him Tom, though that is not his real name. He never attended the church I pastored but that didn't stop me from reaching out to him. Tom was tormented. Whenever I saw him his shoulders were drooped, his face had no affect, he talked slowly and he shuffled as he walked. When I would ask him how he was doing, he would often say something like this: "Not good. I'm really worried." I would then ask him why he was worried and invariably he would answer, "Pastor, I've committed the unforgivable sin and I'm going to Hell." I spent hours with him over the course of many years, trying everything I could think of to help him find forgiveness for whatever was tormenting him. As far as I know, he has still not found freedom.

Before we dive in, let me make a few introductory remarks.

1. While we address various teaching topics at Edgewood, my preaching preference is verse-by-verse exposition where we work our way through a book of the Bible, like we are doing with the Gospel of Mark. There are many advantages to this approach but at the top is the fact that I'm forced to deal with topics that might not make their way into a felt-need kind of sermon series. If our preaching diet were to be totally topical, we'd avoid the tough texts and end up swimming only on the surface.

2. The Bible is an amazing, life-changing book that feeds our soul by providing both spiritual milk and spiritual meat to help us grow.

3. To top all of that off, to attend the Iron Sharpens Iron Conference men's conference with over 100 men from Edgewood, was very moving. I can't wait to see what God will do in, and through men, as God calls us to be tender warriors for Him.

4. It's good for us to emphasize again the importance of context when dealing with difficult verses. New Testament scholar D.A. Carson often quotes his father who said, "A text out of context is a pretext for a proof text." One of the keys to effective Bible study is to let the Bible interpret itself. That's why we study the context, do word studies from the original languages, focus on verb tenses and look at cross-references. As we will see today, all of this is extremely helpful in understanding the unforgivable sin.

I'm praying that our passage for today will comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. There's a warning here about the horrible reality that one could be utterly and totally forsaken by God, judged with His righteous judgment and sent to the everlasting flames of hell.

We saw last week that in dealing with the crowds, Jesus healed many with diseases and freed many who were demonized. He ministered to the public but He also drove truth into people in a very personal way.

We learned that if we want to move from being a fickle fan to become a faithful follower, we must cultivate these three qualities.

- Be in the presence of Jesus
- Go and proclaim Jesus
- Use the power of Jesus

There was always a reaction when Jesus preached. People didn't just sit passively or sleep during his sermons. They either embraced Him or attacked Him. They bowed before Him or blasted Him. As we continue in our passage, we see two strong responses. The first is from those closest to Him and the other from those who were threatened by Him.

1. Friends and family thought he was deranged.

Look at Mark 3:20-21: "Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'" We'll come back to the family of Jesus in our text for next week. Don't miss the obvious application that if you stand up for Jesus your own friends and family may turn on you.

2. Religious police thought He was demonized.

While His family thought He was mad, the scribes thought He was bad. His brothers and sisters thought he was deranged while the religious crowd claimed he was demonized. Remember that Mark 3:6 says the Pharisees and the Herodians were plotting to destroy Jesus. And now the Scribes try to take him out.

News about Jesus had reached all the way to the capital city of Jerusalem, located about 90 miles away. Making the several day journey, the scribes, who served as the religious police, confront Christ by making a very evil accusation in verse 22: "And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.'"

Notice they don't deny that Jesus heals the diseased or that He casts out demons. Instead, they try to discount His power and to destroy His prestige. The New Living Translation renders it this way: "He's possessed by Satan, the prince of demons. That's where he gets the power to cast out demons." Their insulting and vile attack is two-pronged and is designed to turn public opinion against Jesus.

1. They say Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul.

The religious leaders often made this accusation as seen in John 8:48: "The Jews answered him, 'Are we not right in saying you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" But here they are not saying he has an ordinary demon but that Satan himself has taken possession of him. They use a very nasty name that comes from the ancient Canaanites, meaning the "lord of the dung flies" or the "lord of filth."

Some of you are thinking of the words to the classic song by Queen called, "Bohemian Rhapsody." I went back and listened to this rock opera from my high school years and was creeped out when I realized that I used to sing it loudly with the help of the 8-track in my dad's truck. Here are the words: "Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me, for me." The scribes were saying that Beelzebub was inside Jesus.

2. They say Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons.

The word "prince" refers to the chief demon and is another way of saying he bows to Beelzebub and serves Satan.

After laying the ultimate insult at the feet of Jesus, it's time for Jesus to respond in verse 23: "And he called them to him and said to them in parables..." They had just declared that He was possessed by the devil and so we see that He does two things:

1. He called them to Him.

This phrase was used of summoning an adversary into a court of law. I wonder if they were nervous when He asked them to come closer.

2. He spoke in parables.

A parable is an analogy and literally means, "to lay something alongside." A parable took something they understood in order to explain something they didn't. One commentator refers to parables as, "crisp, pungent thrusts" that go into the soul of the listener.

Jesus' answer is summed up briefly and powerfully in the form of an absurd question: "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Good teachers use rhetorical questions and Jesus used them all the time.

Jesus then uses the word "divided" three times in the next three verses to prove His point. This word means, "to be disunited by discord; to be separated into parts."

1. A divided kingdom cannot stand.

His listeners were probably thinking of how Israel and Judah split into two parts after the death of Solomon when Jesus said in verse 24: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

2. A divided house cannot stand.

In verse 25 we're reminded of the importance of a family not fracturing: "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand."

I want to pause here and give God the glory for Edgewood being a unified church. Thank you for how each of you strive to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace as spelled out in Ephesians 4:3. And thank you for how you love and support your pastors. Now more than ever we need to be a church that stands united on gospel truth as our society heads south. Let's continue to march forward on mission for His glory.

3. A divided Satan cannot stand.

Jesus points out the absurdity of their evil argument in verse 26: "And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end." If Satan were to cast out demons it would defeat his own purpose. Satan would never act contrary to his own interests. He wants to destroy the work of God, not his own work.

In Mk 3:27, Jesus goes in for the kill shot, literally: "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house." If you want to take the property of someone, you must overpower the owner. Here Jesus is saying that Satan is the strong man but He is the stronger Savior.

Jesus binds Satan and then plunders his possessions. Kent Hughes believes these possessions, or "goods" are the helpless victims

Satan holds in bondage through his demons. To “plunder” means to “snatch, seize and carry away.” That’s exactly what Jesus has been doing, and continues to do today as He saves people from the bondage of serving sin and Satan.

There is no way that the Lord of Lords is in league with the prince of darkness! Jesus has come to conquer the evil one and to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8 is quite clear: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Jesus is clearly stronger than Satan as evidenced by our passage last week when we saw that the demons “fell down before him” in Mk 3:11.

Keeping in mind the context, let’s look now at the text found in verse 29: “But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” To “blaspheme” means “defiant irreverence.” At its most basic level it refers to speaking evil about the Holy Spirit. One Bible dictionary puts it like this: “To speak reproachfully, to rail at, to revile.” These are deeply disturbing words.

What then is the unforgivable sin? Beth and I received about 15 free books at the conference we attended this week. All we had to do was show our wristband. When I stopped by the table that was giving out free Bibles, the worker asked to see my wristband. I asked her if a lot of pastors had been stealing Bibles. She smiled and said, “I’m not sure but that would be the ultimate sin, wouldn’t it?”

So maybe stealing a Bible is the unforgivable sin? Is it taking God’s name in vain? Is it yelling at Him or murder or adultery or refusing to eat cheese curds (well, maybe)?

In short, the unforgivable sin is attributing the mighty miracle working power of Jesus to Satan. The scribes witnessed undeniable exorcisms and instead of giving glory to the Holy Spirit they claimed that He was possessed by Beelzebub. The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is accusing Jesus of being demon possessed.

I like how **Matt Chandler** puts it: “The blasphemy of the Spirit is the knowledgeable, willful and continued rebellion against the ministry of the Holy Spirit.” **Sam Storms** adds, “It is not a careless act but a calloused attitude...it is not mere denial, but determined denial; not mere rejection, but wanton, willful, wicked, wide-eyed rejection.” It’s a deliberate refusal of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 30 tells us why this person never has forgiveness and is guilty of an eternal sin: “for they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’” The word “for” is like saying, “because.” And notice that they continued, or persisted in “saying.” This was not a one-time thing but rather an on going, fixed and settled attitude in their minds that came out of the mouths.

Some Takeaways

Here are some takeaways from our text.

- 1. Always consider the context.** The unforgivable sin is ascribing to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit.
- 2. Christians cannot commit this sin.** If you are truly saved, then you are truly secure. When you believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life, then you have eternal life. 1 John 5:11-12: “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”
- 3. If you worry that you’ve committed the unforgivable sin, you haven’t.** If you’re mourning and grieving and anxious about sin, it means that the Holy Spirit is active in your life.
- 4. Satan wants to steal your hope and joy.** He wants you to think you’ve gone too far to be saved. He wants you to swim with shame and to be gutted by guilt.
- 5. This is a warning to those persisting in unbelief.** Perhaps you’ve been languishing under true guilt. Conviction is a good thing if it leads you to commitment. You are a sinner and if you have not repented and received Jesus Christ, you will not be forgiven. The good news is that God is ready to forgive each and every one of your sins. Don’t put off a decision to follow Christ. One could say that the only unpardonable sin today is that of continued unbelief. If you die in a state of disbelief, your sins will not be forgiven and you will pay the price for them forever in a place of everlasting destruction called hell with the devil and all his demons!

One of the speakers at the conference made this stunning statement: “Too much emphasis is put on sins and not enough on sin.” I

thought about that all week. Our problem is not the number of sins we've committed; our problem is our sin nature. Yes, we sin in multiple ways but it's because we are sinners by nature. We are sinners who sin.

At the same time, we should be concerned about any sin that we knowingly commit and refuse to give up. Are you tormented by your sins like Tom is? As far as I know, he is still suffering. Actually, most of us aren't unsettled enough about our sins. We excuse them, rationalize them or minimize them by comparing ourselves with others. But if you have not been saved, you should shudder at the thought of entering eternity with your sins not forgiven.

One pastor writes: "Many Christians have such a sentimental view of God's justice that they never feel the terror and horror at the thought of being utterly forsaken by God because of their persistence in sin...God is never neutral toward sin. He either forgives it or punishes it." Romans 2:5 – "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

Let's go back to the verse we skipped and unpack the freedom found in verse 28: "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter." If verse 29 is the bad news, verse 28 is the good news. Most people rush past this part of the passage when discussing the unforgivable sin.

- This is the truth. When Jesus uses the word, "truly" or "verily," He is stating that what He is about to say is absolutely authoritative and reliable. It's like He's saying, "listen up!"
- This is authoritative. Next He uses the pronoun "I say..." to show that He has no need to quote someone else. He's saying, "Listen up, I'm the Lord!"
- This must become personal. And then He personalizes it by saying, "Truly, I say to you..." This message is for you right now.

Notice next that, "all sins will be forgiven" and "whatever blasphemies." The words "all" and "whatever" in the Greek mean "all" and "whatever." The idea is that all manner or types of sin will be forgiven. All sinful behaviors and slanderous blasphemies against God can be blotted out! Listen to a verse from the Old Testament and a verse from the New:

- Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."
- 1 John 1:7: "...and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

Through faith in Jesus Christ, you can be forgiven! Satan would like nothing more than to have you believe that your sins will never be forgiven. But if you know Jesus, your sins are forgiven.

But if you die in your sins, you will never be forgiven. There's no second chance. No do over. No purgatory. Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

It's dangerous to hear the gospel message and to decide to walk away. Don't forfeit the forgiveness He wants to give you. Right here. Right now.

Have you ever repented of your sins? Have you turned from them in utter revulsion and turned to Christ? The gospel Jesus preached starts with repentance according to Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Tax day this year has been extended until Monday. Some people are like the man who wrote the IRS stating: "I can't sleep; my conscience is bothering me. Enclosed find a check for \$50.00. If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest!"

Resist no longer. Repent fully and believe in the gospel. Jesus died as your sin substitute on the cross, His blood paying the price for all of your sins. His sacrifice satisfied the divine wrath of a holy and righteous God. Submit and surrender by the Holy Spirit of God to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Believe that He did all this for you, receive Him as your Savior and determine to follow Him as your Lord.

Don't be like the buzzard that spotted a dead fish on a piece of floating ice in the river. He landed on the ice and began to eat. He knew it was dangerous because the falls were just ahead but he knew his wings were strong and he could fly away right before going over. So he kept eating. But just before the piece of ice tumbled over the falls he spread his wings to fly but because he waited too long, his feet were now frozen in the ice and there was no escape. In an instant he plunged to his destruction.

Fellow sinner, it's time to be saved. → Gospel presentation Here are some great words to ponder if you're a Christ-follower: "I've blown it, but I'm beautiful to God; I'm fatally flawed, but fully forgiven." He makes us new!

Mark 3:31-34 Joining the Right Family

The Bridger Wilderness Area in Wyoming is one of the most pristine areas for hiking in the United States. A number of years ago hikers were asked to fill out comment cards. Here are some of their actual complaints...

- Please avoid building trails that go uphill; escalators would help on steep sections.
- Too many bugs and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the area of these pests.
- The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.
- A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed?
- A McDonalds would be nice at the trailhead.
- There are TOO Many Rocks...

These comments and complaints reveal that most of us are looking for that which is comfortable and convenient. I wonder how our high schoolers will do when they rough it out in Colorado this summer? In a similar way some of us push back when Christ calls us to radical commitment. As we learned a couple weeks ago, Jesus doesn't want fickle fans; He wants faithful followers.

Last week we reflected on some strong reactions to Jesus. His family thought He was mad and the religious leaders believed he was bad. The scribes thought He was demonized and those closest to Him thought He was deranged. We learned that the unforgivable sin is attributing the mighty miracle working power of Jesus to Satan.

In our text today we return to the natural family of Jesus. We'll see how Jesus shakes up our sense of comfort in verses 31-35: "And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.' And he answered them, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.'"

After reflecting on these verses, I wrote down this summary statement: Family is foundational but following Christ must come first. There are three things going on in our passage.

- An urgent request from family (Mark 3:31-32)
- A startling rhetorical question about family (Mark 3:33)
- A radical redefinition of family (Mark 3:34-35)

Let's drill down and follow the flow.

1. An urgent request from family.

We see in Mark 3:31 that Jesus is in a house teaching to a packed audience: "And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him." The word "and" has the idea of "then," referring to what happens next. There are so many people crowded into the house that his family can't get close enough to get his attention. This had to be frustrating for them because they had hiked 30 miles from Nazareth to Capernaum through a lot of rocks to do an "intervention" and now they couldn't even have a conversation with Jesus.

Some of you are wondering how Jesus could have siblings because you've been taught that Jesus was Joseph and Mary's only child. Listen. While his earthly mother Mary was a virgin when she was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, she and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born.

The word "brothers" literally means, "from the same womb." The word for "relatives" was available but the gospel writers use the word for brother. Let's ponder a few other passages where we see that Jesus not only had four brothers (half-brothers), but sisters as well.

Matthew 13:55-56: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?"

Acts 1:14: "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers."

Galatians 1:19: "But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother."

Let's go back to Mark 3:31 so we see how urgent this request is from the family. The word for "called" refers to a summons and has a sense of authority behind it. When I was growing up and would be playing in the backyard and my mom would call me in for supper I might eventually meander into the house. But if my dad whistled, I knew from experience that I better come running. These family members are urging Jesus to stop what He's doing and to come immediately.

Let me make the obvious point that instead of joining Jesus in what He's doing, they are trying to get Jesus to do what they want. We often do the same, don't we? We want Jesus to bless what we've got going on instead of lining our lives up with His plans and purposes. Here's a good prayer to pray: "God, show me where you're working so I can partner with you to accomplish your will."

We see the nature of this urgent request in Mark 3:32: "And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.'" Jesus is told that his family has arrived but He doesn't stop what He's doing because He's following His father. Mary should have remembered what Jesus said when He was 12 in Luke 2:29: "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

The family is foundational but following Christ must come first.

2. A startling rhetorical question about family.

Once the message comes to Jesus that his family is asking for Him, He asks a very startling question, a question that must have messed with his mom and shaken up his siblings: "And He answered them, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?'" I imagine those sitting in the house looking around at each other. The tension must have been palpable. The crowd would have fully expected Jesus to stop his teaching and go with his mom and siblings because in that culture, there was nothing more important than family.

This response of Jesus seems radical to us but would have been revolutionary to those listening because the family bond in first century Israel was tight and long lasting. It was normal for children to live close to their parents, sometimes in the same house. Loyalty to the family was equated with loyalty to God.

A rhetorical question is a figure of speech used to drive truth into a person rather than to elicit an answer. Jesus skillfully asked these kinds of questions to emphasize a point in a powerful but non-combative manner. In Mark 8 alone, He asks 8 different questions. All of this is designed to get his listeners to slow down, to ponder and to be prepared for what He is about to say.

3. A radical redefinition of family.

Instead of easing the awkward tension, Jesus dials up the discomfort they're all feeling. In verse 34, He looks around at those seated in a circle and redefines the family: "And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'" The phrase "looking about" literally means that He "looked round about." Matthew 12:49 provides this detail: "And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'"

Don't miss this. Being a half-brother to Jesus didn't make any difference to their spiritual condition. In fact, according to John 7:5, his siblings didn't believe until after the Resurrection. Even Mary saw herself as a sinner in need of the Savior according to Luke 1:46-47: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." You can be in the best family ever but if you're not in the family of God through the new birth you are lost.

Mark 3:35 provides some clarification about how to make sure one is in the family of God: "For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." We talk a lot about the importance of not having to "do" anything to become a Christian. Works don't save us. So how can Jesus say doing God's will is an entrance requirement into his family? The key is found in John 6:28-29: "Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"

I like how Charles Spurgeon put it: "I will ever maintain that by grace we are saved, and not by ourselves; but equally must I testify, that where the grace of God is, it will produce fitting deeds."

For those who are prone to give Mary more majesty than is due her, Jesus redirects people away from adoring her to the importance of everyday obedience. In Luke 11:27-28, in response to Jesus' teaching, a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus totally reframes the focus from her womb to His Word: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

A commitment to Christ is costly. Hiking with Him through life is hard. Let's be clear. Jesus is not repudiating family relationships. He's just saying that one's relationship to Him through the new birth is more important than a connection one may have through a

natural birth.

The family is foundational but following Christ must come first.

→ Interview Rylie and Debbie Shelton. Rylie and Debbie Shelton are part of our Go Team as they serve in the country of India. I'd like to introduce them to you right now.

1. Debbie, tell us a bit about the ministry God has called you to.

2. Rylie, can you share with us how the family structure in India makes it difficult for people to put their faith in Christ?

I invite you back on Sunday night at 6:00 pm to hear more about how God is using Rylie and Debbie to bring hope to the hopeless in India.

Family Talk

It hit me this week that I play a number of roles in the various relationships I have. I'm an adopted son of the Father through the new birth. I'm a husband to Beth, my sister through the new birth. I'm the father of Emily, Lydia, Becca and Megan and also their brother through the new birth. I'm the father-in-law of Jamie and he's also my brother. I'm one of the pastors of this dear flock and you are my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family (no, I'm not going to sing that song). And I'd like to have a family talk.

There are times in our home when I've called a family huddle. Imagine that we're all sitting together around the table for a time of realignment, redirection and relationship building.

1. Spiritual relationships must take precedence over natural relationships.

We tend to categorize people today as single, married, divorced or widowed. While we will always celebrate and promote marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman for life, singleness is not a second-class status. Fellow family members, let's see each other primarily as brothers and sisters in Christ and as spiritual fathers and mothers. 1 Timothy 5:2: "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

2. If you live out your faith, some in your family will think you've lost it.

If it happened to Jesus, it will happen to you. Maybe your parents don't understand your faith or your spouse doesn't get it or your children think you're too fanatical. After Peter complained about how much they had left, Jesus said these words in Mark 10:29-30: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

This is a mind-boggling statement. Whatever you have lost on account of Christ you will receive a hundred times "in this present age" brothers, sisters and mothers. Where do you get this many siblings and parents? Right here in the church. This is your spiritual family. We are brothers and sisters and we need each other. And this spiritual family is your real family, and it's more substantial than the genetic bonds of a physical family relationship.

3. Invest time in your family but not at the expense of faith formation.

If the sin of parents some time ago was to ignore their family, today it's to make children the very center of everything. We don't have a patriarchy or a matriarchy; we have a "kindergarchy" where marriage revolves around children. We do our kids no favors if they think they are the center of our life and existence. We must love God more than our kids. Kevin DeYoung gives a great reminder, "Our children don't really belong to us. That's a hard word, but a good word, for there is no better parent than our heavenly Father."

The best way to love your family is to love Jesus more than your family. You will never love your family more than when you are totally dedicated to the Lord's will for your life and for theirs. Psalm 127:1: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

4. Don't let sports or other activities crowd out your commitment to Christ.

I'm deeply troubled about how many families are elevating other activities over the importance of gathering with God's people. Over the years as a pastor I've watched families that at one time were faithful in their commitment to Christ and His church, get so involved in traveling sports leagues and other weekend activities that they are now unplugged.

Let me read a few sentences from a tongue and cheek article called, "After 12 Years of Quarterly Church Attendance, Parents Shocked by Daughter's Lack of Faith."

Trevor Michelson was simply stunned at the revelation. "I just don't understand it. Almost every single time there was a rained-out game, or a break between school and club team seasons, we had Janie in church. It was at least once per quarter...It was obviously a priority in our family—I just don't get where her spiritual apathy is coming from."

"You know, the more I think about it, the more this illustrates how the church just keeps failing this generation," lamented Trevor. The Michelsons further noted plans to have a chat with the pastor of their church after their younger son Robert's soccer season calms down a bit.

Parents, can you lean in a bit? I know you don't want to teach your kids that sports trumps spiritual commitment. Let me be quick to add that other activities like camping, fishing and yard work can do the same thing. Let me also say that these are not necessarily bad things in and of themselves. I'm just concerned that these activities can turn into idols and end up replacing that which is most important.

One article I read recently called, "When Ball Becomes Baal," argues that we have deified sports in our society (I posted this on the Sermon Extras tab on our website). Ball can become Baal when it controls your family and you give it devoted worship. Here are two practical ways to put sports in their proper place:

- Decide beforehand that there will be no contest between the church's essential activities designed for your family's spiritual growth and what the team plans for your lives. This decision has to be made ahead of time so that when sports conflicts with weekend worship or youth camp or a special spiritual activity, the decision has already been made.
- Determine that your child cannot play every sport. Be selective in order to protect the rhythm of your family time.

I like how the article ends: "God himself uses sports language in the New Testament. He's not against it, unless it steals the devotion belonging to Him. All other gods have to go!"

It might be good to watch "Chariots of Fire" as a family to see how Olympic athlete Eric Liddell lived out his conviction to not participate in sports on Sunday. A week or so ago, one of the trending stories on Facebook was about how Covenant College refused to play a championship tennis match on a Sunday. They took a lot of heat but I sure respect them.

I wish that all the believers from all the churches in our community that have children that play sports on Sunday mornings would get together and say, "Not anymore. We're not going to allow this any longer. Sunday is the Son's Day and we're going to church as a family." If believers banded together, these leagues would find another day to play. BTW, we also have three service options each weekend so if something does come up on a Sunday, we have a Saturday night service.

5. Partner with Edgewood to help with faith formation in our families.

God continues to bring young families to Edgewood and we're in need of more servants to serve in the nursery, especially during the 10:45 service. The Awana Awards Celebration is this Wednesday night. Our children's ministry is designed to help you reach and disciple your children. I'm thrilled that a number of moms attended the Hearts at Home Conference this weekend. There's a Ladies Spring Luncheon coming up on May 9th. Entrusted with a Child's Heart will be offered again in the fall to help equip moms. The Senior blessing night is coming up where parents will have the privilege of giving a verbal blessing over their graduating senior. The next men's huddle will be held on Thursday, May 5th at 6:00 p.m. And we're committed to calling a Youth and Young Adults pastor because we want to reach students and singles for Christ. We're excited to have a candidate coming next weekend. His name is Kyle Parks and his wife's name is Liesl.

6. Reach out to the little, the least and the lost.

While giving priority to the faith development of our families, we must never forget the forgotten. Matthew 25:40: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." That's why we partner with Pregnancy Resources as we together stand up for life in the QCA. What a joy to be able to give over \$53,000 toward the purchase of the Mobile Ultrasound Unit (the total cost is \$130,000 and the remaining need is now less than \$10,000!). Once again, we'll be participating in the Baby Bottle Project beginning Mother's Day weekend. We also partner with World Relief in standing for the vulnerable by serving refugees and I'm looking forward to the World Refugee Festival on June 18th. We're also learning more about the ministry called Safe Families as they stand in the gap in the foster care system.

7. It's going to take courage to live out your commitment in a culture that doesn't value what God values.

1 Corinthians 16:13: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” It’s time for all men to man up. Do we have men and women here who are willing to make a commitment like Joshua did in Joshua 24:15? “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Determine right now, that no matter what, that you will serve the Lord. Live out our 4Gs personally...and as a family. Gather. Grow. Give. Go.

Did you notice in our passage that there is an “in” and an “out”? Twice we read that the natural family of Jesus was “outside.” This is the scandal of the gospel – those who think they’re insiders are usually outsiders; and those who start as outsiders often end up on the inside. The least likely person can be Jesus’ brother or sister.

The way to enter the family of faith is through receiving what Jesus has done for you on the cross. John 1:12-13: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” The key is not who you are related to but who you have a relationship with. And the only way for that to happen is to be born again.

Family is foundational but following Christ must come first.

The Christian life is not easy. It’s not meant to be. Discipleship is difficult. The path is often uphill and the route is rocky. Your commitment to put Christ first will be tested. Will you complain and seek the easy way or will you follow Christ into hard places? It’s worth it because He’s worth it. Obey the Word of God and embrace the will of God.

Closing Song: “I’m Running to You”

So I’m giving up control
Because You are my Lord
I’m running to you
Embracing surrender

Mark 4:1-20

Sowing the Seed

How many of you plant a garden each year? Do you have seeds in the soil yet? I love that springtime is sowing time. I drove up to Madison on Tuesday afternoon for a speaking engagement and saw some farmers preparing their plots for planting. Farming has really changed over the years. Tractors today are guided by GPS systems with sub-inch accuracy so that no section of soil is missed or any rows are overlapped. Seeds are precisely inserted into prepared soil along with a scientifically measured shot of insecticide to combat rootworm. Some farmers still use horse-drawn planters and a few plant crops by hand. In Jesus time, farmers used a unique method for sowing seed.

Please turn to Mark 4 as we unpack the parable of the sower. Verse 1 gives us the setting: “Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.” Jesus taught in the synagogues and He also taught by the sea. I love that He used different methods without changing the message. We must be willing to do the same. What worked some time ago might not work now. That’s why we’ve been emphasizing the importance of loving our neighbors, which we’ve defined as anyone in need that we come across. We’re to start with those who live near us and also take the gospel to the nations.

The crowd is massive so Jesus jumped into a boat and sat down. It was common for teachers to sit while teaching. The crowd is fanned up the sloping hillside in a natural amphitheater where they could see and hear Him clearly. It’s been estimated that up to 10,000 people could fit on this hillside.

In Mark 4:2 we read: “And he was teaching them many things in parables.” The word parable means, “to throw something beside something else” and has the idea of placing two things together in order to teach a spiritual truth. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, helping us to picture in concrete that which is abstract. Parables are like mental “time bombs” designed to be unforgettable and then to explode into meaning for those who are serious about listening to the Lord. There are approximately 35 parables found in the gospels.

Drop down to Mark 4:10. I love how Jesus taught publicly but also explained what He meant privately. That's a good model for us. We must gather publicly but also meet with Him privately in order to grow. In Mark 4:11-12 He gives two purposes of a parable:

- **They reveal.** If someone is open they will understand the "secret of the kingdom of God."
- **They conceal.** Conversely, if someone is closed and hardened, they will "indeed hear but not understand."

In other words, we receive what we're receptive to. If you are not open right now, you're probably not going to get anything out of the sermon. Only those with receptive hearts will receive what God wants to reveal.

Verse 13 tells us that if we understand this parable we will be able to understand other parables as well: "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" Sounds like we better pay attention, right?

Fortunately, we don't have to guess about the meaning of this message because Jesus provides an interpretation for the disciples beginning in Mark 4:14: "The sower sows the word."

Most parables have one overall meaning with lots of other applications. After reading and rereading this parable, I wrote down this summary statement: When you go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow.

Look at Mark 4:3: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow." Jesus wants them and us to lean in and listen. The word "behold" is like saying, "Lo and behold!" and is designed to get our attention. Everyone back then understood how seed sowing worked. Perhaps Jesus is even pointing to a sower sowing while he is teaching.

A farmer would have a leather pouch across his shoulders filled with seed and would walk down paths slinging the seed out, much like we do when planting grass. The seed would be "broadcast" into all sorts of soil, some good, and some not so good [demonstrate by walking down the aisles].

The farmer's goal was to get his good seed into good soil so it would grow because the seed has life in it. The seed is small but powerful and will produce fruit if the conditions are right. But it must be planted in good soil in order to achieve its intended purpose.

Do you ever wonder how someone you love can hear a clear gospel presentation and yet not respond by receiving Christ? Are you bothered when you see someone seemingly make a decision for Christ and get all excited about it only to end up drifting away when disappointment comes? Does it trouble you when others get all wrapped up in the worries or wealth of the world and bottom out spiritually? What's up with all that? The bottom line in these situations is that conversion never occurred, though it seemed like it did. The problem was with the soil, or the soul...not with the seed or the sower.

As we walk through this passage, ask yourself which kind of soil represents your soul.

Here's how we'll proceed. We'll study each soil individually in Mark 4:4-8 and then we'll bounce over to verses 15-20 to see how Jesus ties each soil type to a "soul type."

These four soils represent four different responses to the Word of God. It's our privilege to ponder the parable and then hear how Jesus interprets and applies it. By the way, that's the right way to study the Bible. Begin with observation – what does it say? Then go to interpretation – what does it mean? And then end with application – what's the lesson I can live out?

1. A Hard Heart.

Look at Mark 4:4: "And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it." Fields in Israel were small and were separated from one another by paths that became like concrete from all the people and animals walking on them. The seed that hit this hard ground would just lie there until the birds gobbled it up. In our culture it would be like throwing grass seed on the sidewalk.

Jesus interprets the first soil in Mark 4:15: "And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them." The phrase, "takes away" means, "to seize with force, to rob." Notice that Satan does this immediately. He loves to bring confusion and to cause callousness when the gospel is communicated.

Are there any hard hearts here today? Do you feel cold or calloused? Have the feet of others beat you into a hard place? Have you been trampled upon? Do you have protracted pain or has bitterness put you in a bad place? Have you been burned in the past,

maybe even by a church, and you've locked your heart into a vault?

When you go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow.

2. A Hollow Heart.

The second soil is described in Mark 4:5-6: "Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away." In that part of the world, much of the land was solid rock with just a thin layer of soil on top. The sun would bake the rock, which would keep the soil warm, thus causing the seed to germinate quickly. But because there was no root system, these plants would wither and die.

When these people hear the message, they become very exuberant and emotional. Look at Mark 4:16: "And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy."

This soil looks ready but the problem comes when problems come. Because of their emotional enthusiasm, their roots didn't go down deep as we see in verse 17: "And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away." As soon as difficulties come, they ditch their superficial spirituality. A person like this has a hollow heart and was never converted in the first place. Behind the emotional fervor is an empty faith.

We could call this "convenient Christianity" because this person likes the idea of forgiveness and heaven and receiving "God's favor," but doesn't want any difficulties. This individual wants emotionalism not exposition and is controlled by feelings not faith. Or maybe the fault lies with a gospel presentation that was superficial and focused only on having great health and gigantic wealth. Benefits were promised without a cost being counted. A shallow gospel can lead to a hollow response. Listen. Christianity is not about sustaining some sort of emotional high.

Would you notice that Jesus doesn't say "if" tribulation or persecution comes, but "when" it comes? The word "tribulation" has its background from the threshing roller used to smash grain and means, "to crush, press, squeeze or break."

Trouble and tribulation will strengthen true believers and it also reveals those who have only had an emotional experience. It's common for people to bail on Christ when things get challenging. Listen to John 6:66: "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."

Did you have an emotional response some time ago but now you've fallen away? Were you happy about Jesus but now you just feel hollow? Have problems come up with your job, your family or with your health? Inside are you angry because you're thinking you didn't sign up for this?

Perhaps you just focused on the benefits of belief without counting the costs of commitment – like repentance, dying to self and being all in for the one who is all in for you. Maybe you've never really been converted.

When you go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow.

3. A Hindered Heart.

Seeds fall on the third kind of soil only to be choked out by weeds. Jesus describes it this way in Mark 4:7: "Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain." The word "choked" means to "choke utterly." The seed is strangled by thorns and thistles and ends up producing no produce. Have you noticed how hard it is to grow a garden when it's full of weeds? The seeds of weeds are endemic to the soil, meaning the weeds are already there. I'm reminded that John Calvin referred to the human heart as a perpetual "idol factory."

Jesus interprets this soil in Mark 4:18-19: "And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." Let's list the three things that can **hinder a heart** and **keep one from being converted**.

- **Cares of the world.** The word for cares is "anxiety." This person is so caught up with cares and concerns that they can't focus on faith.
- **Deceitfulness of riches.** To be "deceived" means to be seduced. That's exactly what the love of money can

do to us. 1 Timothy 6:17 says to not set our “hopes on the uncertainty of riches.” G. Campbell Morgan believed that persecution is Satan’s second best weapon; his first is materialism.

• **Desires for other things.** The phrase “desires for other things” can be translated as “lusting for all the rest.” Luke 8:14 defines this as “the pleasures of life.” God’s word cannot thrive and survive in a hindered heart. Proverbs 27:20: “Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.”

I posted Mark 4:18-19 on Facebook this week and received some immediate feedback. One person wrote: “I gotta be honest, this has been me.” A second person posted: “This is me.” A third person responded: “It’s my struggle as the Lord presses in on me.”

The apostle Paul had a so-called “brother in Christ” bail on him, revealing that in actuality, because he had a hindered heart, he had never truly been converted. His behavior revealed that he wasn’t a believer as stated in 2 Timothy 4:10: “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me...”

If you’re distracted you’ll eventually depart. If you’re all up in the ways of the world the Word will be choked out. If you have a hindered heart, there will be no harvest.

4. A Humble Heart.

There’s only one kind of soil that produces a crop as seen in Mark 4:8: “And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” The good ground was not hard, hollow or hindered. If a farmer during that time had a harvest that was seven times what was sown it would be called a good crop. To have yields of thirty, sixty or one hundred times would be astonishing. Notice the four words that show a continuous kind of action – produced, growing, increasing and yielding.

When you go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow.

I picture Jesus smiling when he declares in verse 20: “But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” The word “good” refers to that which is excellent and beautiful.

Humble-hearted people hear and accept and bear fruit. Luke 8:15 says that this person “keeps the word and bears fruit with patience.” He listens to the Lord, He loves Him, and then He lives it out. Saving faith produces fruit. I like what was said about the Bereans in Acts 17:11: “they received the word with all eagerness.” Those same words could be said about Edgewoodians (is that a word?).

Fruit bearing is the mark of a disciple according to Jesus in John 15:8: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” When we are faithful, we will be fruitful.

Questions for Kyle and Liesl

Speaking of fruit bearing, I’m eager to introduce Kyle and Liesl Parks to you. Kyle is a candidate to become our Youth and Young Adults Pastor. Under Kyle’s leadership the ministry he led in his previous church tripled. His approach to ministry is highly relational as he seeks to connect students and singles to Christ and then equip them to live on mission.

1. Kyle, you mentioned that the Parable of the Sower is one of your favorites. How has God used this passage in your life and ministry?
2. Liesl, can you tell us a little about yourself and your family? What are the names of your sons and their ages? What do you guys like to do for fun?
3. Kyle, we’ve been learning how to live on mission by focusing on our neighbors and the nations. Tell us how you flesh out this value personally and in your ministry to students and singles?
4. Kyle, this is a very important position. If God calls you here, how will you provide leadership and direction for students in junior high and high school as well as for college students and young single adults?
5. Kyle, what excites you the most about being considered as the Pastor of Youth and Young Adults?
6. Liesl, tell us how you work with and support Kyle as a partner in ministry. Why do you think Kyle would be a good fit for this role?

Let's go back to Mark 4: 9: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." One of the keys to living the Christian life is to never stop listening to the Lord. Do we hear and heed what He says? If we're not willing to "heed" what God says, we won't "hear" what He says. To say it another way, if you're willing to love God, then you will listen.

Here are some ways we can both hear and heed.

1. Trust the Word of God to produce lasting growth.

Did you hear that the Bible is now on the American Library Association's Top Ten Most Challenged List for the first time? We will unashamedly continue to preach the gospel and teach the Word here at Edgewood because as Romans 1:16 says, it is the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." When you speak into those who are not yet saved, make sure to continuously sow the seed of God's Word into hearts, and not just your own thoughts, political perspectives, opinions and ideas.

2. It's always a bit scary to sow the seed.

When a farmer sows seed he's putting grain into the ground instead of using it to feed his family. Farmers know what it is to live on faith. Psalm 126:5-6: "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

I contacted a friend who farms this week and asked him a question: "As a farmer do you ever have doubt that the seed will sprout when you plant it?" Here's how he replied: "I used to stress over it every year. What if it rains, what if it doesn't. There are a hundred things to worry about...we plant when the conditions are right and let God take over. It doesn't turn out how I expect, but it always turns out. The things we can handle (weeds) we do, but the things beyond our control He will handle."

3. A small percentage of what is planted actually grows to maturity.

I talked to a woman last week about the opportunity she had to share her faith with a family member. I rejoiced with her and then she told me that she felt like a failure because the person did not receive Christ. If we are to use the percentage from the parable, only 1 of 4 actually bears fruit. Don't despair. Just keep sowing. Keep smiling and serving up the Word. Acts 17:32-34 reminds us that a few respond while many reject.

4. Not all believers will bear the same amount of fruit.

We'll all bear some so don't be jealous of those who seem to have more. At the same time, don't coast either. In a similar way, in the Parable of the Talents, each person received a different amount (see Matthew 25:14-30). The key is to use what you've been given for God's glory.

5. The harvest will be huge.

When the seed of the gospel gets into a humble heart, exponential growth will happen. That's really the point of the parable - When you go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow. The harvest is sure. Isaiah 55:11: "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

6. Pray that God will prepare the soil in souls and in our society.

I went on a prayer walk with my friend Jim Tuesday night on the UW campus. He does this several times a week, sometimes leaving at 8:00 pm and returning at midnight. That explains in part why so many students are coming to Christ (see Colossians 4:3-4). Can I encourage you to participate in the National Day of Prayer this Thursday? Believers are gathering for breakfast and lunch at the Quad Cities Prayer Center. There are also gatherings at various locations in the QCA during the lunch hour – a printout is available on the resource table.

7. Keep sowing the seed.

Our job is to sow. The seed will germinate when it hits the prepared heart. Ecclesiastes 11:6: "In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good."

When you go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow.

This parable must ultimately become personal. It's interesting that each of these four soul types "hear" the Word – in the first

instance, the seed fell “along” the trampled trail. In the second, it fell “on” rocky ground. In the third, the seed settled “among” thorns. In the fourth, the seed went “into” the good soil. Have you allowed God’s Word into your life?

I saw some farmers preparing to plant while I was driving on Tuesday afternoon and on Tuesday night I saw what a spiritual harvest looks like. The Bible Study I was speaking at in Madison was supposed to begin at 9:30 p.m. but the guys didn’t arrive until 10:00! I shared Scripture with them and openly wept as I realized that most of them were brand new Christians. I was overjoyed when I met someone who lives in the same dorm in which I came to eternal life 36 years ago!

I shared my salvation story with the guys and urged them to commit themselves fully to Christ so that they will bear fruit for Him. I went to bed at 1:00 a.m. and couldn’t sleep because I was so excited to see what God is doing in the middle of a secular, humanistic and godless campus. The gospel is taking root and fruit is sprouting everywhere!

Are some of you ready right now to let the seed of the gospel get into your soul?

Closing Song: “Our God”

Mark 4:21-34

Unstoppable Growth

David Platt, author of several books, including *Radical*, is now the president of the Southern Baptist’s International Foreign Mission Board. Beth and I heard him preach a sermon about a month ago that crushed me. I’ve watched it several times and think about it often. I found it unusually unsettling and quite convicting so thought I would paly a three-minute clip. If you want to watch the entire message, it’s posted on the sermon extras tab on our website.

Play Sermon Clip by David Platt – [“Martyrdom and Mission: Why Reformers Died In Their Day; How We Must Live In Ours”](#) (Play at 44:06-46:50)

What will it take for the concept of unreached peoples to become totally intolerable to us in the church?

When did it become OK for us to be OK with unreached people dying without hearing about Christ and spending eternity in Hell?

- 2 billion unreached
- 90% of unreached live in Gospel resistant areas
- 495,000 villages in India have no Christian presence

The 10/40 Window is the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude. This area is home to some of the largest unreached people groups in the world, including those in Turkey.

Today (Sunday) has been declared as the Day for the Unreached. As part of the focus today in churches and mission organizations around the world, a “Manifesto for the Unreached” was put together. I want to read part of it.

- Unengaged and Unreached People. We refuse to stand idly by as people enter eternity without Christ when we can share the good news that transforms them through any means possible (Acts 5:40-42).
- Declaration. We will shout from every peak, pinnacle and rooftop that the only hope for this dying world is a relationship with Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).
- Summary. As long as God provides His abundant grace, we will not stop or be deterred from this calling. We work relentlessly for the day when a gaze around the expanse of heaven reveals thousands worshipping at Jesus’ feet because of the mission He gave us for this moment in eternity (Revelation 5:9-10).

I’d like to lead us in prayer.

- Repent and ask God to shake us out of our sleepy lethargy
- Pray that God would give us a heart for our neighbors and the nations
- Pray for God to soften hearts to the truth of the gospel
- Ask God to raise up believers to go and reach these groups

- Pray for multiplying churches to be launched

It's easy to get discouraged when we look at the unfinished task and the hard hearts of so many people in our neighborhoods and in the nations. Our passage of Scripture today is designed to help us see that God is on the move...and it's our joy to join Him. I was helped by some insight from the brand new Gospel Transformation Bible's commentary on the parables we'll be looking at today:

"The growth of this new messianic rule appears outwardly unremarkable, at least initially. But the influence of the kingdom develops progressively to reflect the visible glory of God. Followers of Christ can easily grow discouraged by the fact that many of the powers and established structures in this world seem to overshadow the emerging kingdom of God. Jesus encourages all followers to trust that God's purposes, which grow slowly, will be accomplished, despite all setbacks. The counterintuitive nature of God's kingdom should not surprise us. After all, the gospel of grace is itself a message that confounds our expectations and tells us that things are not as they seem..."

We're going to tackle four parables that remind us of the unstoppable growth of the gospel so we can join God in what He's doing to reach the unreached among the nations. Two weeks ago we plowed into the Parable of the Soils and learned that when we go and sow, the kingdom of God will grow.

The word parable means, "to throw something beside something else" and has the idea of placing two things together in order to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus employs four metaphors to explain the growth of the gospel.

- The lamp helps us see that we're to glow.
- The measure urges us to know.
- The plant reminds us that it is normal to grow.
- And the mustard seed demonstrates that our faith will show.

The progression goes from glowing to knowing to growing and then showing.

1. Glowing.

Look at Mark 4:21-23: "And he said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.'" The picture here is of an oil lamp that is designed to light up a room. In that culture these lamps were often put on a table or up on a nook in the wall in order to dispel the darkness. It would be totally absurd to take this lamp and put it under a basket or under a bed.

The main application is that Jesus came as the light of the world to dispel the darkness. Do you see the phrase, "brought in"? In the original it reads this way: "Is a lamp come into the house?" Christ was hidden from many at the beginning but is now made manifest in the world. That's exactly what John 3:19 says: "...the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

The secondary application is that you and I are called to shine the light of the Lord to others. Philippians 2:15 tells us that we've been placed "in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

Unfortunately, some of us are not shining because we're all up into sinning. Instead of exposing deeds of darkness, we're enjoying the darkness. Mark 4:22 reminds us that "nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light." Achan's sin was eventually exposed in Judges 7:1-26. Numbers 32:23 notes: "be sure your sin will find you out." 1 Corinthians 4:5 says that the Lord: "will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart."

What is concealed now will be revealed later. If we want to keep glowing, we must make sure we continue knowing. That leads us to the second parable.

2. Knowing.

Mark 4:24-25 help us see that the more we listen, the more we'll learn: "And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'" This is the principle of reciprocity – we get out what we put in. Every time you receive God's Word with eagerness and openness, God will give you more.

Did you see the story this week that Facebook has been filtering news on their Trending Ticker? It's been revealed that the algorithms they set up and the human curators they've hired have been serving as gatekeepers so that conservative news stories don't show up. This is a huge story because Facebook boasts over 1 billion account holders. Since 2/3s of American users get their news from Facebook, the stories they see are being filtered by a small group of people.

This is a good reminder for us to be careful about what comes in through our eyes and ears: "Pay attention to what you hear," which literally means, "Look at what you hear." How do we look at what we hear? In the parallel account found in Luke 8:18 Jesus says, "Take care then how you hear." We're to take heed how we hear. We're to be gatekeepers about what goes into our minds. Paul expands on this idea in 2 Corinthians 10:5 when we're told to "take every thought captive to obey Christ."

Let's flesh this out a bit more.

- If we have a high capacity for knowing, God will pour knowledge into us. If we bring a big bucket, God will fill it up, and then some: "...and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given." Isaiah 55:7 says that God will not only pardon but "abundantly pardon." Ephesians 3:20: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think..." And Malachi 3:10 tells us that when we honor God with our giving – BTW, 10% (a tithe) is a good place to start. When we put Him first with our finances, He will "open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."
- If we have a distracted capacity for knowing, our knowledge will be diminished. The end of verse 25 is ominous: "...and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." It's both obvious and profound – if you want to know, you'll know. If you don't want to, you won't. Or to say it another way: people do what they want to do. That reminds me of the Parable of the Talents where the guy who was given one talent buried it and then ended up with no talents.

A week ago Thursday about 60 men gathered for a Men's Huddle time as a follow-up to the Iron Sharpens Iron Conference, where 108 men from EBC attended. I had the delight of speaking from 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." We pondered 5 Mandates for Men from this passage (there are extra cards available at the Welcome Center if you'd like one).

1. Wake up
2. Stand up
3. Man up
4. Grow up
5. Love up

I referenced an article entitled, "The Modern Man and His Fantasy World." If you want to read it, it's posted on the Sermon Extras tab on our website. Here are some highlights: "I have noticed a trait, particularly among men, where faith is impeded. I'm talking about a cultural fixation upon fantasy...men are giving themselves to something they can see but is not real. However, with Christianity we give ourselves to something that we cannot see but is actually real."

Here are the three fantasy worlds men are giving themselves to...

- Pornography
- Fantasy sports
- Video games

"We find that men are reluctant and stagnant in their Christianity because they are thriving in a fantasy world. Is it any wonder why there is such a decline in biblical masculinity in the church? It is a shame that many men are far too busy conquering fake lands, looking at fake women, and winning fake championships to follow Christ's path of self-denying, cross-bearing, service."

Let me say it more strongly than I did to the men that night. If you live in fantasy land, you won't grow in your faith.

Do you remember the acronym GIGO that came out many years ago? It stands for "Garbage In, Garbage Out" and is a concept common to computer science and mathematics: the quality of output is determined by the quality of the input. If you put garbage in, garbage will come out. If men (and women) focus on fantasy, we will not glow for Christ and our ability to know Him will be short-circuited.

Let's change this up a bit. GIGO can also mean, "God In, God Out."

John Acuff perceptively quips: “If you do the work, things happen. If you don’t, they won’t. I wish it were more complicated than that because then I’d have a better excuse to not do anything.” Some time ago I heard a pastor say that most American Christians are educated way beyond their level of obedience. BTW, I posted this quote on Facebook on Friday and it generated a lot of discussion. I was going to tell you about it but the algorithms I set up wouldn’t allow me to.

We must obey what we know and then God will give us more. What measure are you using? Make sure it’s big enough and then let God add even more. If you want to know Him, you will because Galatians 6:7-8 promises: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

Glowing, knowing and...

3. Growing.

I met with a pastor friend this week and he told me that sometimes he wonders if preaching is really worth it. He had just shared some biblical truth with someone in his church and they had rejected it. I told him of the time I got up to preach in our previous church and started by saying something like this: “Does preaching even matter? Some of you have heard hundreds of sermons but little seems to change in your life. I’ve heard thousands of sermons and personally preached hundreds of them and sometimes I get down about how little I’ve changed. Is this really worth it? Why don’t we see more growth?”

In the parable of the growing plant, we’re reminded that there’s a mystery about how growth happens in Mark 4:26-29: “And he said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’”

One of our tasks as Christ-followers is to sow the seed of the Word of God: “as if a man should scatter seed on the ground...” I love watching how God uses Duane Roesner as he comes into the office each week to make copies of tracts that he’s written. He then goes out into the community and hands them out.

The seed is sown but the sower can’t make the growth happen. He doesn’t dig up the seed to see if germination has taken place. He may water and remove weeds but he doesn’t touch the seed. We can sow but we can’t make the seed sprout. No matter if the farmer is sleeping or doing something else, the growth of the seed is in God’s hands: “He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows...” The farmer goes through his daily routines without exerting any extra energy into the plant to make it sprout.

According to the last phrase in verse 27, things grow but “he knows not how.” In Greek, the word order is quite lively: “How, he does not know.” This is a good reminder to me that the gospel message can’t be manipulated or managed or marketed. The seed of the gospel grows and we don’t know how.

In Mark 4:28 we see that something spontaneous happens when the seed is put into the soil: “The earth produces by itself...” The phrase “all by itself” in Greek is where we get the word “automatic.” It’s the idea of being self-acting or without visible cause.

We cannot make seed grow; we can’t even explain how it grows. This statement describes the organic growth that explodes underground leading to impressive growth above. Just like the seed germinates out of sight, so too, the seed of the gospel begins to grow before it will show.

Verse 29 shows us that sowing eventually leads to harvesting because when the seed takes root, there will be fruit - “But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

If you’re weary of sowing the seed and tired of all the weeds, then you might want to memorize Galatians 6:9: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Hudson Taylor, missionary to China, used to say that there are three qualifications for a missionary – “patience, patience and patience.”

Here’s how I summarize this parable: Our part is to sow; God’s part is to make it grow. The growth may be slow but it will eventually grow. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

I've shared these before but it's good for us to be reminded of 8 fast facts about spiritual growth.

- It's normal to not see immediate results from evangelism. You may simply be the first in a long line of seed sowers.
- It's normal for a Christian to grow. If you're not growing, something is wrong.
- Germination is spontaneous but growth is not instantaneous. Growth takes time.
- Growth is not always easy to measure.
- Be gracious with those who still need to grow.
- Be intentional about your own growth.
- Help others grow but remember God brings growth.
- Sow the seed in your children and wait for it to sprout.

Glowing leads to knowing, which leads to growing and finally to showing.

4. Showing.

In the final parable we see that the smallest seed grows into the tallest shrub. Look at Mark 4:30-32: "And he said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'"

In order to compare how the kingdom of God works, Jesus focuses on something that is very small. It's interesting that Jesus didn't say the kingdom comes like a gigantic mountain or a rushing river but like a seed that is so small that its hard to even see. Those listening were expecting the kingdom to come with a cataclysmic bang where judgment would be immediate and the Messiah would set up his resplendent reign in Jerusalem.

I'm told that it takes about 750 mustard seeds to make up a single gram and there are about 21,000 seeds in an ounce.

Let's think about how Jesus entered this world. He was born in the little town of Bethlehem and reared in the backwaters of Galilee in a nasty town called Nazareth. Jesus' parentage was questioned and his followers were a rag-tag team of misfits. He was rejected by his own people and despised by others. He was crucified as a common criminal and then his body was put in a borrowed tomb.

But look at what happens next! "Yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants..." The smallest turns into the tallest! The mustard bush becomes a shrub-like plant that looks like a tree, some growing as high as 15 feet!

When the seed was planted it looked like nothing much was happening. There were a few followers of Jesus. Acts 1:15 says that there were about 120 devoted believers. But on the Day of Pentecost, over 3,000 were saved at one time. A short time later, another 5,000 came to Christ at one time. Not too many days later, the church in Jerusalem was said to number 50,000!

And the growth of the gospel continues today! Listen to how Revelation 7:9-10 describes a time in the future: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

This is a good reminder for us to not look down on the little, the least and the lost. Zechariah 4:10 tells us to "not despise the day of small things." God loves to take what appears to be insignificant and do amazing things.

Notice that the mustard shrub "puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." Commentators differ on what this means but I believe it's a reference to how the gospel goes to all nations and when it does it provides comfort wherever it has germinated.

When people are saved in a society, compassion and morality spring up. Hospitals and schools and orphanages take root. Cannibalism is destroyed, polygamy is pulverized and child sacrifice is ended.

Let's summarize.

Make sure you're glowing.

Don't stop knowing.

Keep growing.

And make sure you're showing.

Here then are some practical ways to live out these parables.

Action Steps

- Utilize summer Sunday nights for sowing the gospel seed with your neighbors. We have two more Sunday night services in May and then we won't meet during the summer so you can be free to hang out with your neighbors. One of the organizers of the "Day for the Unreached," made this statement recently: "As many believers in North America have lost concern about their neighbors who don't know Christ, it's becoming even harder to be concerned about people around the world who they will never meet."
- Join the Tuesday night prayer group here in the library.
- Attend the Walk for Freedom event. As a way to learn more about our "next door nations," I encourage you to get involved in the World Refugee Day on Saturday, June 18 at the Singing Bird Nature Center at Blackhawk State Park.
- Join a 30-day prayer effort by praying for an unreached people group at dayfortheunreached.org. If you sign up, you'll receive an email prayer request every day.
- Download the Joshua Project App on your tablet or smartphone (JP Unreached). This will help you learn more about a different unreached people group every day and give you specific things to pray for.
- Utilize our Go Team Video Screen to learn more about our missionaries.
- Continue giving during services or online. Around 11% of what you give each week goes to support missionaries, some of whom are targeting unreached peoples in the 10/40 window. We're also in discussion with some new church planters so we can get behind these efforts. Edgewood has helped to launch many churches over the years. We support them for a limited period of time and then we find more church planters and repeat the process.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit. This Sunday is known as Pentecost Sunday, the day we remember how the Holy Spirit empowers and equips believers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

What will it take for the concept of unreached peoples to become totally intolerable to us? We must make sure we're sowing and glowing and knowing and growing and showing. We are called to not just survive but to thrive.

Closing Song: "Thrive"

Mark 4:26-29 God Brings Growth

Because I'm not real handy, I often have no clue how certain things work. I have some visuals up on the stage to show what I'm stumped about.

Let's start with this microwave. I know you plug it in and punch some numbers and it cooks your food but I have no idea how it works.

I did learn that it was invented after someone walked by a radar tube and the chocolate bar in his pocket suddenly melted.

I have no insight into how this iPad works either. I have no clue how this sermon can go through this wireless microphone, be recorded on the computer in the back, uploaded to iTunes and then download in seconds to this device so I can play it as a sleep-aid tonight when I have a hard time falling asleep.

Like a hero returning from battle, the Twinkie is back! Now that a new company is making them, they are still essentially indestructible but instead of lasting 25 days they now have a shelf-life of 45 days! Invented in the 1930s, these delectable delicacies have 39 different ingredients, with two of the flavors coming from petroleum. Would anyone like one? I bought them back in 1978 but I think they're still good – if it's a bit stale just deep-fry it...or put it in the microwave. You'll be glad to know that the new Twinkie has fewer calories...but that's because it's smaller than the old one!

Last week we looked at four different soils on which the seed is sown.

Since seed sowing in souls can be discouraging and disheartening, today we're going to study a short story that is found only in the Gospel of Mark. It's located right after the parable of the sower and its aim is to bring encouragement to us.

The parable of the sower demonstrates the importance of the quality of the soil. This parable shows the power of the seed itself. We could summarize it like this: When the seed takes root, there will be fruit. We might not know how God works, but we know that He is working.

Let's listen to this very practical parable from Mark 4:26--29: "And He said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'"

I see two main encouragements in this passage.

1. We can sow but we can't make the seed grow (Mark 4:26--27).

One of our tasks as Christ--followers is to sow the seed of the Word of God: "as if a man should scatter seed on the ground..." That is our responsibility and according to Spurgeon, "Holy seed sowing should be adopted as our highest pursuit." We must get the seed of God's Word into the souls of people because if Jesus is to be known, the seed must be sown!

After the ground is prepared and cultivated and fertilized, the seed is sown but the sower can't make the growth happen. He doesn't dig up the seed to see if germination has taken place. He may water and remove weeds but he doesn't touch the seed. We can sow but we can't make the seed sprout. No matter if the farmer is sleeping or doing something else, the growth of the seed is in God's hands: "and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow..." The farmer goes through his daily routines without exerting any extra energy into the plant to make it sprout.

This past weekend some friends from Pontiac surprised us by coming to the second service. We went out for lunch afterwards and had a blast catching up with them. Wes is a farmer and I asked him how his crops were doing. He smiled and said, "I've done everything I can do. Now I just wait. It's all up to God now."

When good seed goes into good soil, good things happen. When the seed takes root, there will be fruit.

Friends, we don't have to understand how things work in order for them to work. I don't know how this microwave or iPad or Twinkie work, but that doesn't stop them from working. According to the last phrase in verse 27, things grow but "he himself does not know how." In Greek, the word order is quite lively: "How, he does not know."

Ecclesiastes 11:5 reminds us that the way God works is not always understandable: "As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything." That verse, and many others, reminds me that God is growing life in the wombs of mothers all over the world right now...and those lives need to be protected. I celebrate the work of the Pregnancy Resource Centers in the Quad Cities and our family looks forward to joining in on the Walk for Life on September 21st. You can sponsor some walkers out in the lobby after the service.

I sometimes hear people say that they don't share Jesus with people because they think they don't know enough. Listen: Our part is to sow; God's part is to make it grow. After establishing the necessity of the new birth, Jesus told Nicodemus that there's a sense of mystery about the Spirit in John 3:7--8: "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." If someone were to ask you to explain exactly how the new birth works, you'd probably struggle a bit. If anyone does ask you this, tell him or her that once they experience it, then they'll know what it is.

What's true in an agricultural setting is true in the spiritual world. We can sow but we can't make the seed grow. The beginning is often insignificant. What we see next is that spiritual progress is often imperceptible.

2. Growth is slow but it will eventually show (Mark 4:28--29).

In verse 28 we see that something spontaneous happens when the seed is put into the soil: "For the earth yields crops by itself..." The phrase "all by itself" in Greek is where we get the word "automatic." It's the idea of being self-acting or without visible cause. The only other time this word is used is in Acts 12:10 where we read about the iron

gate “which opened to them of its own accord.”

We cannot make seed grow; we can't even explain how it grows. This statement describes the organic growth that explodes underground leading to impressive growth above. Just like the seed germinates out of sight, so too, the seed of the gospel begins to grow before it will show.

Martin Luther was spot on when he said, “After I preach my sermon on Sunday...I return home...and I just let the gospel run its course.” When someone was converted, he would give them two items – a Bible and a hymnal and would say, “Let them loose and like fire they will spread on their own.”

I read recently that a seed that was buried in an Egyptian tomb was found thousands of years later and when it was planted in the ground, it grew! Why? Because there is life in the seed. I love what 1 Peter 1:23 says about the seed of the Word of God: “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.”

While germination is spontaneous, growth is always gradual. Look at Mark 4:28: “First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.” Check out this time-lapse presentation of how corn germinates and grows. [[Show YouTube Video](#)]

Watching that video makes me marvel even more at the miracle of growth. An ancient Jewish prayer goes like this: “Blessed are you, O God, King of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth.” I don't know much about how corn grows, but here are some “fast facts” about how faith grows.

Fast Facts about Spiritual Growth

- **It's normal to not see immediate results from evangelism.**

Many Christians have given up on witnessing simply because they've made an effort and didn't see any results. Remember that you may simply be the first in a long line of seed--sowers before the person is saved. Because the Word is powerful and productive, we need to be patient. The great missionary Hudson Taylor once said that there are three qualifications for missionaries: “patience, patience, and patience.”

- **It's normal for a Christian to grow.**

To say it another way, if you're not growing, then something is wrong.

- Germination is spontaneous but growth is not instantaneous.

While some of us want to have “microwave” faith where everything happens quickly, the truth of the matter is that growth takes time.

- **Growth is not always easy to measure.**

Kingdom growth is often detected only at certain stages because we can't always see change in our lives from day to day. But, when compared to what you used to be there should be change and visible fruit. I like the words to the Brandon Heath song called, “I'm Not Who I Was.” They go like this: “I wish you could see me now; I wish I could show you how; I'm not who I was.” 2 Peter 3:18: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

- **Be gracious with those who still need to grow.**

As Celebrate Recovery reminds us, there are hurts, habits and hang--ups that can derail us. New Christians need our love and support as they figure out how to live for Christ. It's often messy, isn't it? Some habits and sins take a long time to overcome. Once again my farmer friend Wes told me something about farming that has great application to faith formation. He practices no--till planting, which means the old corn stalks are not plowed under before the soybeans are sown. He told me that it's best for a farmer to go away for a couple weeks when the beans start coming up because it looks messy and ugly. As the beans poke through the old chaff the stalks seem like they're taking over. He said it's hard to look at. But, with time, the beans do fine and the fields turn green. That's a great picture of new believers, isn't it? When the seed of new life sprouts, the old chaff and leftovers from a life lived apart from Christ seem dominant. But with time and the gentle discipleship of older believers, the plant sprouts and matures.

- **Be intentional about your own growth.**

We grow when we want to grow. Or to say it another way: You are as close to God as you want to be. Maturity does not come from eating “Spiritual Twinkies.” If you want to grow, you’ll need to be intentional about it. Read your Bible every day. Pray. Serve. Attend and participate in Sunday services. Join a Life Group or a Sunday morning ABF this fall. Share your faith. Love your neighbors. Find an accountability partner. Get rid of sin in your life. Change your friends. Practice the spiritual disciplines.

- **We need to help others grow but ultimately it’s God who brings growth.**

Have you ever tried to help a person grow but because their heart wasn’t into it, nothing happened? While I enjoy mentoring and discipling others, I take great comfort in the fact that God is the one who brings growth.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 3:6-7: **“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.** So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”

It’s God’s providence, not the farmer’s power that makes grain grow. Likewise, I can’t make people grow but I can direct them to God who will grow them.

- **Sow the seed in your children and wait patiently for it to sprout.**

Psalm 126:5-6: “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

Mark 4:29 shows us that sowing eventually leads to harvesting because when the seed takes root, there will be fruit --

“But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

We sow, God is in charge of “grow” and then we get to focus on what will show.

If you’re weary of sowing the seed and tired of all the weeds, then you might want to memorize Galatians 6:9:

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

One pastor hit it on the head when he writes:

“You can’t see what God is doing – working behind the scenes and beneath the soil of hearts – to bring souls to Himself.”

I love harvest time but I’m sure farmers love it even more! That’s why they plant in the first place. Our girls get a kick out of me because sometimes I feel sad when all the corn plants are cut down. Everything just seems so brown and desolate. But then I remember that the golden nuggets are in the bins or on the way to the elevator. And that puts a smile on my face...and on the farmer’s.

An insignificant beginning leads to imperceptible progress, which results in immeasurable success. That’s how it’s always been in God’s plant kingdom and that’s how it is in his “people kingdom” as well. We don’t have to know it all before we sow to all because when the seed takes root, there will be fruit.

The Word at Work in the World

We don’t spend near enough time celebrating what God’s Word is doing around the world. In spite of all the bad news that we hear, God is on the move and His harvest is coming in! Let’s be honest. Sometimes we can feel like the world is winning, but actually the Word is winning!

Check out the words of Jesus in John 4:35: “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”

- WDLM and K-Love. Don’t you love to be able to turn on the radio or to jump online and hear God’s Word preached and sung?
- Pregnancy Resource Centers. I love how God is using His word to call people to protect what God is forming in the womb.
- Christian Literature. I’m glad that we make gospel tracts and other resources like “Anchor for the Soul” available as gospel seeds. Duane Roesner sure does a great job creating tracts and handing them out all around the Quad Cities.

- Work in Kenya. A couple weeks ago we heard about what God is doing in Kenya through the work of the Eberhard's. Wanting to partner with them in a specific way, Edgewood is sending them \$1,000 to finish the church building, along with \$1,800 to sponsor a pastor so he can complete theological training.
- E--Media Board. This is just a teaser but I want you to know that in just a week or so, you will be able to go out to the lobby and learn about all 89 of our missionaries by using a touch e--media screen. Our missionaries are getting the Word out to people in 34 different countries around the world!
- Paul and Carlene Eager. These church--planters will be at Edgewood tonight to share how the seed of the gospel is germinating among the people of Poland. I hope you come back to hear them.
- The Bible and Literature Missionary Foundation. I received a mailing this week from this ministry out of Tennessee that is shipping 365 tons of Bibles – 2 million Scriptures to 145 countries. I like their motto: "Shipping Tons of Truth."
- Our website (edgewoodbaptist.net) is getting the Word out onto the web through our sermons. In the last 30 days, we have had over 1,400 visitors from the US, along with visitors from Canada, Philippines, the UK, Japan, Singapore, Australia and Malaysia. All told, we have had almost 6,500 page views.
- EBC App. Our tech team is working on an Edgewood App for smartphones and tablets so that we can get the Word out to more people. It will be available on Apple, Android and Windows platforms.
- The American Bible Society is announcing a new domain on the web called .Bible. The President of ABS said, "This is the Bible's moment to move from Gutenberg to Google...the goal of making the Bible more accessible has inspired innovation since the 1400s when the printing press was created."
- The YouVersion Bible App. This free app for smartphones and mobile devices now has 600 unique Bible versions in almost 400 languages and has been installed on 100 million devices all around the world! I just read this week that it has been used in every country on earth.
- AWANA. This ministry works strategically to plant the gospel seed in young hearts. The Edgewood AWANA team is charged up about the next ministry season, which begins on September 4th. We have a need for more seed--sowing servants if you'd like to join the team.
- Calvary International Revival Church. This church, made up of refugees from six African countries, is located just three miles from us. We have helped them clean out their building and are now storing their equipment. I can't wait to tell you more about how God is moving us and other churches in the QCA to come alongside them in their time of need. Stay tuned for details.
- Global Growth of the Gospel. Those who study missions say that the gospel is exploding in five primary countries right now -- China, India, Indonesia, Brazil and Nigeria.
- Muslims are coming to Christ. When our daughter Emily served in an Asian country she had the opportunity to hold hands with a Christian woman from a Muslim background and pray for her.
- A woman Beth and I know started a women's ministry training center in Russia 10 years ago. The 21 women initially trained taught others, who taught others, who in turn taught others. There are now fourth and fifth generation groups in over 40 cities across Russia!
- Compassion International. The love of Christ and the seed of the gospel is being spread around the world through the ministry of Compassion International. Partnering with over 5,600 international churches, Compassion has seen 163,527 kids and moms pray to receive Christ over the last year. Did you know they have over 1.1 million sponsors? But there's a need for a lot more. We have a table set up in the lobby and we encourage you to make a difference by spreading the gospel seed in the life of a child through sponsorships. We're going to watch a video now about this ministry and I want you to listen for the theme of seeds bringing spiritual fruit.

[Play Compassion Video]

Friends, the harvest is here! It's inevitable! It's exciting! God does His work silently, slowly and yet he does it surely! Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." By the way, we're wrapping up this series next week with a parable that focuses on the second coming of Christ. We're calling it "Being Ready."

Some years ago, Dr. Richard Halverson, formerly the chaplain of the U.S. Senate and the pastor of a large church in Washington, D.C., was once asked this question: "Dr. Halverson, where is your church?" He glanced at his watch and replied, "Well, it's three o'clock in Washington, D.C. The church I pastor is all over the city. It's driving buses, serving meals in restaurants, having discussions in the Pentagon, deliberating in congress...periodically, we get together at a building on Fourth Street, but we don't spend much time there. We're mostly in the city."

Friends, where is Edgewood Baptist Church located? It's all over the world today through our missionaries and through

your sponsorship of children through ministries like Compassion. Edgewood is scattered through the Quad Cities and beyond. Our church is also at Deere and at Alcoa and at the Arsenal and at schools and at offices and hospitals and factories and at restaurants and on football fields and in parks and in schools and in homes and in neighborhoods...and periodically we get together on 38th Street in Rock Island!

Listen to these stirring words preached by Ray Stedman over 40 years ago (www.pbc.org):

"There is the process...which is going on secretly underneath all the confusion and the hoorah and hoopla of the world, beneath all the political chicanery and maneuverings of governments, within and above and beyond and beneath and around all the structures of society, this seed is growing secretly. God is producing his great and final harvest and it will all come to pass exactly as he says...God has not failed, and the church has not failed. It cannot fail...seed is growing unto harvest, exactly as the Lord Jesus said. It will increase as you allow that seed to be planted in your own heart and God will give the increase."

Isaiah 61:11: "For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."

I'm not sure how all these things work (point to items) and I'm not exactly sure how new life happens...but I know it does. What I do know with certainty is this: the seed of the Word works in accordance with how surrendered we are. Are you ready to surrender all? Will you say, "Lord, I need you?"

Closing Song: "Lord I Need You" (Saturday) "I Surrender All" (Sunday)

Mark 5:1-20 Breaking the Chains that Bind

Nate Weaver Testimony – Part 1

My Name is Nate, I'm an unashamed believer in Jesus Christ and I struggle with sin.

When I was 16-years-old, my worst nightmare and biggest fear came true. My parents announced that they were getting a divorce. I was devastated by this news and I plunged into a state of shock, depression, grief, and confusion, without any support or sense of identity. I resorted to a survival mode mentality.

I soon discovered that my ego combined with my anxiety issues made for very good company with alcohol consumption. It was the beginning of a long tragic love affair, and God had been removed as even a blip on my radar for quite some time at this point.

Throughout college my drinking increased exponentially and what I thought at the time was just "experimental" drug use became much more than an occasional activity.

In 2005 probably the second most traumatic event in my life happened. One of my best friends who I had known since 7th grade died in a tragic car accident...this is where my drinking took its most dramatic turn.

I was working in sales for a company and some of my co-workers liked to split a couple pitchers of beer for lunch at work. This increase in drinking quickly started to become out of control and I didn't even seem to notice it creeping up on me. Eventually I was drinking 24/7, morning, noon and night. Every waking moment of my life was controlled by the thinking about, acquiring and consuming of alcohol. It wasn't long before my mind and body were completely dependent on the substance and it started to affect my relationships and reliability at work.

On a February morning in 2009 I had been feeling ill for a few days so I left work early. The next thing I remember is waking up in the ICU. Apparently I had an alcohol withdrawal induced seizure and I wrecked my car and had been in a coma for three days.

This was my first introduction to the horrible affects that this poison drug does to the body. It is like no other drug in the way that it makes the body's vital central nervous system completely dependent on alcohol to function properly. You would think this near death experience would be enough to scare someone into sobriety forever. Unfortunately, for this alcoholic, not being able to drink was still scarier than death. These are the delusions of addiction at their finest.

I still somehow managed to keep a job for about three years. This lasted until October of 2012 when I went to the emergency room because I was vomiting blood nonstop. The doctors looked at me in amazement. They said that my vitamin levels were so low that I should have had a cardiac arrest three days earlier. I told them it had been at least 2 weeks since I had eaten anything. They called me a walking dead man.

Nate felt like a walking dead man. Grab your Bibles and turn to Mark 5 where we'll meet a man who could be the main character out of the Night of the Living Dead or the main star in the Zombie Apocalypse.

Last weekend we traveled with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee when a mega storm came up and we learned that God's plans may be puzzling and they often include problems. But those same plans come with His presence and His power and they always have a purpose.

After Jesus stilled the storm, we read in verse 1 that "they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Garasenes." Let's just admit that this is a rather strange encounter where we see three realms meeting – Satan, Society and the Savior.

Let me also point out that the Bible declares demon possession is a real issue. This man is not just deranged or suffering from mental illness nor is this encounter just symbolic of evil in the world today. The Bible presents demon possession as sober reality and that's how we should take it as well.

I like what C.S. Lewis wrote: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

I see a progression in this passage that can be summarized with three words that will serve as our outline:

- Destruction
- Deliverance
- Deployment

1. Destruction.

Nate just described the destruction that he experienced through drugs and alcohol. Let's look now at the destruction demons were causing, leaving a man in mega misery. Mark 5:2 says that, "When Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." It was still dark when they landed on the shore of a cemetery and as soon as Jesus disembarked a wild man ran up to him. This had to be an eerie experience for the disciples as their nerves were already shot from the storm on the lake. Luke tells us that he didn't have any clothes on and that he was "driven by the demon" (Luke 8:29).

Mark 5:3-5 says that no one could restrain or subdue this man. On top of that, he was self-destructive. He was uncontrollable outcast: "He lived among the tombs. No one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones." He made his dwelling among the dead. The word for "crying" means that he was shrieking and screaming wildly. He was defiled, depraved and desperate! Satan loves to distort and destroy the image of God in people.

Satan had wrecked him and society couldn't reform him. His problems couldn't be solved by social programs nor could he be assisted by human intervention. Self-help programs didn't help because he was self-destructive. Nothing could restrain him. His lifestyle was destroying him. And he never stopped crying and cutting himself.

In short, he was hopeless and helpless, isolated and empty, trapped and tormented...and he needed someone to deliver him.

2. Deliverance.

Nate went through a long period of destructive behavior but then Jesus Christ began to deliver him. Let's listen to the next part of his testimony.

Nate Weaver Testimony – Part 2

My mom flew in from the Quad Cities and took me back with her to admit me into Riverside inpatient treatment facility in Rock Island. We had a few different outside groups that would come in and talk to us about recovery but this one group stood out to me. They would sing contemporary Christian music and talk about the importance of Jesus Christ in the 12-step process. They emphasized sobriety and recovery but most importantly that a relationship with Christ is something to celebrate. I was intrigued. I said "Wait a minute, you are going to give us food, sing with us, and tell us about God and 12-step recovery? I need all of those. Sign

me up!” After my month long inpatient treatment at Riverside, I moved in with my Mom and her husband. I started attending Celebrate Recovery but I relapsed within 30 days. It was breaking my mom’s heart as it does any parent to watch their child struggle like this. So in January of 2013, they had me admitted into Country Oaks. At first I was furious. Once my anger settled down I thought long and hard about my options. I could be defiant, angry, and bitter which would accomplish nothing or I could swallow my pride and say I don’t like the situation but I am determined to get the most out of this. I found out from my counselor that Edgewood actually buses people out to Celebrate Recovery from Country Oaks. From that point on I was at CR every Friday night. After a couple of months, the CR band announced that they were looking for a drummer. I clearly saw how God had placed me at the perfect place at the perfect time in my recovery. This new responsibility that God had blessed me with was huge to my recovery. I had been playing drums my whole life and I now realized that God had been preparing me for this opportunity to use this gift to worship Him. I knew that I still needed a lot more help if I was going to make this last and that meant that I needed to really develop my relationship with Christ. I immediately signed up for the next 12-step study group. It is hard to put into words the beautiful feeling it was to have rekindled my long-lost relationship with Christ. I still had a lot of my life to clean up from years of wrecking it but I saw hope and felt a peace and comfort that I had always looked for in a bottle. Though my relationship with Christ was growing I reached a point where I was faced with giving up some of my past. God wanted to make me into a new creation and I was not willing to completely trust Him by surrendering everything in my life. I had only 8 months of sobriety and my refusal to completely surrender started to make me feel discontent. I now know that this is the most dangerous feeling in my recovery and the surest sign that I am close to a relapse. I found myself flat on my face quite literally. I spent another miserable winter in what was a very low depressing time to say the least. By January of 2014 I was back in the hospital detoxing and clinging to life once again. I look back on that relapse and thank God for it. It taught me so many good lessons but I had to pray and ask Him to show them to me as He healed my mind, body and soul. It made me realize that I had to completely surrender my whole life to His will. If I hold on to even part of my sinful will it will turn from a small path into a highway for the enemy into my life. I thank God for the storms and the hardship because without them I never would have found peace. By working through Celebrate Recovery, I was able to identify the root causes of most of my bad habits including alcoholism. I asked God for freedom from this one compulsive behavior and He showed me that the key to dealing with what I thought was my one primary issue was to face all my sinful disobedience. I can’t just mask one and hope the others go away. It just doesn’t work like that. This process is not easy and it is not quick but it is free because God’s Grace is free. I had to do more than turn the care of my will over to God; I had to accept the sacrifice that Jesus made as my sin substitute. He died so that I didn’t have to. How could I turn down a free gift like absolute forgiveness and eternal life? I had to be willing to be open and honest with myself and with God. By working through my past and not around it God helped me to heal. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” The great thing about my Savior is that He asks me to surrender everything and gives back to me what I need. But He gives it back better than it was before, and more than I had in the first place.

Let’s look and see how this messed up man found deliverance from his destruction beginning in verse 6. As this tombstone terrorist came running up to Jesus he hit the brakes and fell on his knees: “And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before Him.” This shows the power and authority of Jesus. He hadn’t even said a word and the miserable man was on his face as if in worship before Him. This man who ran from everyone else, ran to Jesus! This makes me think of Philippians 2:10: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”

The demon in this man becomes greatly distressed because it knows exactly who Jesus is. Verse 7 tells us what he said, “And crying out with a loud [megas] voice, he said, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, the Son of the Most High God?’” The demon detects a dangerous opponent in Jesus and cries out with a booming voice.

It’s interesting that demons are not atheists and their doctrine is orthodox. They know exactly who Jesus is and call Him by His divine name – “Son of the Most High God.” The demon cries out in fear because it’s scared as James 2:19 says: “Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

By the way, this is less a confession and more a ploy to try and usurp the authority of Jesus. Declaring one’s name was considered a way to secure mastery over someone. And then the demon dared to arrogantly misuse the name of God as he tried to get his way: “I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” Jesus recognized that this man was in anguish not just mentally and emotionally but also spiritually and therefore needed deliverance. Look at verse 8: “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

In Mark 5:9 Jesus demands that the demon identify himself: “‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’” A legion (not the American Legion) was made up of 6,000 highly trained Roman soldiers, revealing that this man had an army of evil spirits inside him.

What happens next is a bit strange in Mark 5:10-13: “And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, ‘Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.’ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.”

The demons don’t want to go to the abyss and so they beg Jesus for permission to go into the pigs. The tense here is that they repeatedly made this request. Whatever else you think about the destruction of all these pigs, notice that Jesus gave the demons permission. Don’t ever think that Satan is more powerful than God or that he’s on the same level with Him. Satan is a created being who can do nothing without God’s permission.

BTW, this “swan dive” is the first case of “deviled ham” and answers the common question about whether pigs can fly. They can’t. They can’t swim either. That’s a lot of bacon on the beach!

In Mark 5:14, we see that the herdsmen have a cow about the pigs and so they “fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened.” We know from Matthew 8:33 that they wanted to come see what had happened to the man. The people are curious and so they now come and check it all out. Verse 15 describes their reaction: “And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind...” This had to blow their minds. No one had been able to help him and now he’s healed. He went from screaming and shrieking and breaking shackles to sitting peacefully. He is now clothed and calm.

You’d think people would be really excited but instead they become very unsettled. Look how Mark 5:15 ends: “...and they were afraid.” It’s interesting, isn’t it? Why would they be afraid after he had been delivered? For the same reason the disciples wiggled out after the wind and the waves were stilled. They knew they were in the presence of deity.

While they were afraid of this maniacal man when he lived a destructive life they had gotten used to it. Now they don’t know what to do when they see that he’s been delivered. His transformation was so dramatic that they freak out. You would think they would ask Jesus some questions or find out how he could deliver them from the sins that were suffocating them. But instead of being drawn to Jesus, they demand that Jesus depart.

By the way, some of you have experienced something similar since you’ve been saved. Your friends and loved ones don’t want you to talk about Jesus because they’re now uncomfortable around you.

We see this in Mark 5:16-17: “And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region.” This is one of the saddest sentences in Scripture. Lots of people choose dysfunction over deliverance because they are afraid to change. Have you noticed that some seem eager to learn about Jesus and others want nothing to do with Him? I’m reminded that it’s difficult to stay neutral about Him. You either want the Deliverer to deliver you or you want Him to depart from you. I saw something on Pastor Dan’s Facebook wall this week that serves as a good reminder: “We change when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of changing.” Are you ready to change?

Jesus doesn’t force Himself on anyone. When He’s invited, He comes. When He’s received, He responds. When He’s told to go away, He leaves. Many people don’t have anything against Jesus; they just want to keep Him at arms length. One pastor sounds a warning: “When Jesus knocks on the door of your heart, run quickly to let him in. Do not think that He is obliged to come back again and again. We want a gentle Jesus who keeps his nose out of our business and who will take us to heaven but not interfere in the way we live on earth. We want a Jesus who builds our self-esteem and makes us happy, but we want nothing to do with the Lord from heaven who calls us to take up our cross and follow Him.”

3. Deployment.

We see the progression from destruction to deliverance and finally to deployment. Nate, would you come back up and share how God has been revealing His purpose to you?

Nate Weaver Testimony – Part 3

I reached a point during this process where I realized that I wasn’t satisfied to just stop being a bad drunk. I

wanted more. I wanted to start being the best Christian man that I could be. I have lived in many different places in this world and I have experienced many “so called” pleasures of the flesh but at the end of the day I was always left feeling empty and alone. C.S. Lewis said, “It’s not that God thinks we ask for too much; He thinks we settle for far too little.” Jesus wants to give me a real life... and I chose a party. Jesus wants to give me long-lasting contentment... and I chose a cheap, short lived high. Jesus wants to give me a loving wife and I chose one night stands and pornography. I’m tired of getting what I want. I’m now ready to get what Jesus wants me to have and I’m tired of selling myself short and settling for anything less. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” If I am honest with myself I have to admit that I should be dead several times over. So at some point I had to ask myself WHY ME? Today, I now know the answer, and it’s as true for me as it is for anyone. It’s because I have a purpose, and it’s not my purpose but it’s a purpose that has been given to me by the very same person who saved me, which also happens to be the same One who created me for that very purpose. I live my life in constant pursuit of more understanding about how to fulfill this purpose. I never dreamed that I would be playing Christian music in a church but now I realize that it’s one of many of God’s purposes for me. I now have the honor of co-leading small groups on Friday nights and a 12-step group on Sunday nights. God has taken me from destruction to deliverance and has now deployed me as a volunteer at Riverside in-patient treatment center! Now I’m the one on the other side telling them about this awesome program called Celebrate Recovery that I first heard about sitting right where they are sitting now. It has all come full circle and God has turned this washed up wanna-be into an active member of the Body of Christ. And the best part is, He and I are just getting started!

Let’s look now at how this delivered man was deployed. The crowd wanted Jesus to get away from them while the man wanted to get close to Him. Check out Mark 5:18: “As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged Him that he might be with Him.” He who feared His arrival now dreaded His departure.

It’s interesting that Jesus honored the request of the people to leave them alone but denied the request of a disciple who wanted to spend time with Him. It’s because Jesus had a greater purpose for him. He was to be deployed as a man on mission to the very people he already knew. In verse 19 Jesus gives him his marching orders: “And He did not permit him but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.’” He was to go to his neighbors and to the nations with his salvation story.

No one is ever saved to sit. Now that you know, you must go. Once you’re saved, you have a story to tell.

Sometimes we don’t speak up for the Savior because we’re afraid we’ll be asked questions we can’t answer. Listen. You don’t have to have all the answers. I love how the man born blind replied to a bunch of religious guys who were grilling him after he was healed in John 9:25: “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” Psalm 66:16: “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul.” Jesus tells us exactly what to say: “Tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.”

This man went from destruction to deliverance and now he is fully deployed in verse 20: “And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.” When God saves us we must share it with others. That’s what the Samaritan woman did in John 4:29: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” The word for “proclaim” is translated as “publish.” The Decapolis was a federation of 10 Greek cities. We read that “everyone marveled,” which means that they were struck with astonishment.

Putting the Passage into Practice

1. Use this outline when you give your testimony.

One of the best ways to tell someone your salvation story is to follow the progression from this passage. Move from destruction to deliverance to deployment. Or to say it another way, start with talking about what your life was like before you met Christ. Then let them know how you got saved and end by celebrating how your life has been changed after you were saved. Start where you are and tell what you know. Go and tell.

2. God can accomplish much through one person wholly devoted to Him.

D.L. Moody often said, “The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in the man who is fully consecrated to Him.” Incidentally, because of this man’s faithful witness, legions of people came to faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus returned to

this area later a whole crowd came out to see Him and believed. The Decapolis became a center of Christianity for many years. And it came about through the impact of one person. Don't forget that Jesus came to this side of the lake for one man and now that he's on mission amazing things are happening. One man or woman on mission for Christ can accomplish much.

3. Intentionally spend time with lost people this summer.

One soul is worth far more than any possession. I'm reminded of some advice I heard a pastor give when trying to shepherd multiple people with multiple problems – "Do for one what you wish you could do for all." That person you walk by...those people you look down on...that person you secretly judge...that person who scares you...is a soul for whom Christ died. You have never met anyone who does not matter to God.

Here's an action step. In the 12 weeks of summer, intentionally have a meal or coffee or dessert with six different people who don't go to Edgewood...yet. On average that's one get-together every two weeks. You could reserve Sunday nights for intentional neighbor-ing since we don't have Sunday evening services in the summer. You can do it. We can do it.

4. Partner with ministries that are bringing freedom to people.

I've been very moved by all the ministries and places to get help in the QCA. Here are some that I wrote down. These first ones are our Go Team Partners, which means that every time you give of your financial resources during the offering or when you give online, you are helping these ministries go with the gospel.

- Moody Radio (Under Jason Crosby's leadership, Moody Radio is bringing the Word to lives in this region)
- Pregnancy Resources (Baby Bottle Project – Mobile Van will be here July 5th!)
- World Relief (Walk for Freedom on June 18th)
- Calvary International Revival Church (made up of refugees from 7 different countries in Africa)

And this month we've added two new ministries to our missions Go Team:

- Youth Hope (a ministry that shares the hope of Jesus Christ by focusing on children and youth activities for low-income families through street outreach, youth centers and camping ministry. BTW, you have an insert in your bulletin with a list of needs these campers have)
- Safe Families of the QCA (volunteer movement motivated by compassion that gives hope and support to families in distress.)

I also think of the ministry we have by extension in two big areas. Both of these make Anchor for the Soul from Keep Believing Ministries, another one of our Go Team partners, available to people.

- Jail Ministry (Larry McLean shares the gospel with inmates at the Scott County Jail)
- Salvation Army (Gary Pickering reaches out to men at the Salvation Army every Sunday night)

In addition, Nate Weaver is ministering at Riverside Inpatient Treatment Center. And then I think of other ministries in the QCA like Christian Care Rescue Mission and the 180 Zone. Their mission is to bring the love, hope and opportunity of Jesus Christ to those in crisis situations by preventing, reaching and developing in partnership with local churches. I attended their banquet a week ago with over 800 other people and was blown away with all God is doing through this ministry.

I also celebrate Christian counselors and those serving in the mental health and medical fields!

And I'm grateful for what churches and fellow pastors are doing in the QCA. I saw a pastor friend at the 180 Zone banquet and when we left he gave me a hug and said, "I love pastoring the Quad Cities with you."

And of course, we celebrate the life change that happens in literally hundreds of people just like Nate through Pastor Dan's leadership of Celebrate Recovery! In November we'll celebrate the 15th anniversary of CR here at Edgewood.

5. Don't play around with sin.

Satan does his most sinister work in secret ways by "disguising himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Listen. Just because something looks good or feels good does not mean that it is good.

Satan is out to fleece you as he seeks to destroy you. John 10:10 says, "The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy." This man lost his family, his decency, his self-control, his friends, everything. Don't let that happen to you. We don't know what led to his bondage but somehow he opened himself up to the dark forces of evil. Proverbs 5:22: "The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him;

the cords of his sin hold him fast.”

Sin will always take you farther than you planned to go, keep you longer than you were planning to stay, and cost you more than you were planning to pay. Jesus said in John 8:34 that “everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” Sin is no small thing. The more we play around with it, the more in bondage we become.

6. Today is your day for deliverance.

No one could help this man and he couldn’t help himself either. Jesus gave him freedom and He can break the chains that bind you as well. Nothing is too hard for Him and there is no sin beyond His power. Jeremiah 32:27: “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is anything too hard for me?”

Like this man you and I live among the dead because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We’re shackled by sin and Satan is sabotaging our lives. That’s why we need the Savior. If you ask Him, Jesus will enter the squalor of your sinful depravity and set you free. Jesus tamed the tombstone terrorist and He can tame you. He turned a drunk into a drummer for Christ!

Are you ready to admit that you’re a mess? Will you cry out for His mercy? In the midst of your destructive behaviors, ask Him to deliver you. And when He does, you’ll be deployed and thus fulfill your purpose in life.

Closing Song: “Amazing Grace: My Chains Are Gone”

Mark 4:35-41

Finding Peace in Storms

Even though I grew up in Watertown, Wisconsin, I have a lot of fear related to water. When I was around 8 years old, I was out on Devil’s Lake (appropriately named, I might add) with my dad and some of his buddies on a homemade pontoon boat. We were night fishing for lake trout. After fishing in one spot for a while, we decided to move to another location so my dad bent down to start the motor and pulled the rope. It started fine but proceeded to fall off the boat and sink to the bottom of the lake. My dad and his buddies thought it was funny but I was afraid. We were in the middle of the lake in pitch darkness and had no oars so we had to use some old kitchen chairs that had been fastened to the floor of the boat to paddle our way to shore. I didn’t think we’d ever make it.

A few years later I was in a small boat on Lake Michigan with my dad fishing for salmon. It was a cold, windy and rainy day. But then it got worse. Let’s just say that I turned various shades of green and ended up expelling the Johnsonville brats, cheese curds and Snicker bars I had consumed for breakfast.

When I was a teenager I was out on Rock Lake with some friends and one of my sisters. I was skiing while my buddy steered the boat. He tried to make me fall by turning the wheel sharply. When he did, I fell and then he fell off the seat and landed on the floor of the boat. The boat made a circle and came directly for me as I bobbed like a buoy in the water. At the last second my sister (I guess I do like my sisters) grabbed the wheel and turned it, moving the boat away from me.

Then, days before I graduated from high school, I was out swimming with some friends in the Rock River right below a power dam when my friend Tim drowned before my eyes.

To this day I’m wary of water and would rather be a bum on the beach than wander into the waves. Our text for today is located on a lake and we’re going to discover that the disciples had some pretty intense aquaphobia as well.

Please turn to Mark 4:35-41. If you’re using the pew Bible, it’s found on page 1068. Justin Rumley, our summer pastoral intern will read our text and then pray for the sermon. Justin grew up at Edgewood and is the son of Mark and Janet and is now a student at Moody Bible Institute. Would you stand in honor of God’s Word and follow along as he reads?

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Let's climb in the boat with Jesus as He takes us to the other side. Jesus obviously has some plans for His disciples that they know nothing about. They've been "learning" a lot and now it's time to see if they will live what they've learned. In this text we'll discover five truths about God's plans for modern-day disciples.

1. His plan may be puzzling.

Check out verse 35 – "On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'" This has been a long day of ministry that starts in Mark 3:20. Jesus has been confronted by the scribes and criticized by his own family. Because of all the crowds, Jesus used a boat to teach some parables and now He wants to go for a boat ride to the other side.

Here are some reasons why Jesus may have wanted to cross the lake.

- To escape the crowd and get some rest. The eastern side of the Sea of Galilee was less populated and would be easier to find peace and quiet. Verse 36 says that they were "leaving the crowd."
- To teach and train the disciples.
- To free a man in bondage (more about this next week).
- To reach an unreached culture with the gospel.

We know from Mark 1:38 that Jesus continually moved to other towns and communities as part of his mission. Last week we focused on unreached people groups. We do that because that's what our Master modeled for us. If you want to grow in your understanding of the unreached and begin praying practical prayers, check out two resources we included in the bulletin. By the way, the gospel seed is germinating in big ways in Africa and China and most recently, in Nepal.

While the Sea of Galilee is mentioned 53 times in the Gospels and is the setting or backdrop for many of the messages and miracles of Jesus, hardly any focus is on "the other side." That's primarily because that side of the lake was where the Gentiles lived and Jewish people avoided that area at all cost. They didn't want to hang out with pagan people and it was commonly believed that the devil himself had his dwelling there.

The "other side" was unsettling and uncertain so they'd rather stay away. Likewise, we're called to follow Jesus' plan even when it doesn't make sense. Incidentally, this is not a suggestion but a command of Christ according to Matthew 8:1: "...He gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake."

Just as Jesus called His first followers to go with Him to the other side, so too each of us must go where He goes, even if we're uncomfortable with people who are different from us. We have an opportunity to do just that on Saturday, June 18 for World Refugee Day at Blackhawk State Park. During the walk for freedom we'll get a sense of what it's like for refugees as they walk hundreds of miles without food or water. BTW, if we raise a certain amount of money for this, Pastor Ed will be in the dunk tank!

The disciples don't hesitate. If that's where Jesus wants to go then that's where they'll go. We see this in verse 36: "And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as He was. And other boats were with him." They took Jesus "just as He was," meaning they didn't make any preparations or gather any provisions because He was already in the boat. Luke 8:23 mentions that the conditions are perfect: "And as they sailed..."

2. His plan often includes problems.

The Sea of Galilee is really a lake but is called a sea because it has a lot of the same characteristics. It is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide and is the lowest fresh water lake in the world. This sea is known for its severe storms as cold wind whips down from snow-capped Mount Hermon and combines with the warm lake air causing explosive thunderstorms and gale-force winds. It was not uncommon for the waves to reach a height of 10-12 feet and sometimes up to 20 feet. One commentator writes: "The Sea was known to swallow entire ships and gulp down people."

It was a common superstition for people to view the water as the abyss, where demons lurked in the deep. This sea was considered the manifestation of the realm of death. Besides that, the lake was thought to be where mysterious sea creatures, known as leviathan, lived. Given these superstitions, it's no wonder that many lived with some aquaphobia.

Look at Mark 4:37 - "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling." The word "great" is the word "megas" which refers to something being huge. The word for "windstorm" is used of a tempest or a hurricane. Matthew uses "seismos" or seismic to describe it. The imperfect tense is utilized to let us know that the sea "kept spilling over into the boat." Matthew says the boat was being "swamped" by waves. Luke 8:23 says, "they were in great danger."

Don't miss the point that Jesus sent them into the boat, knowing that a storm was coming. In order to get to the other side they had to go through a storm. Don't think that just because you're going through some choppy seas that you're somehow being punished or

that you're being disobedient. No doubt God does send some storms to get our attention like he did with Jonah in Jonah 1:4: "But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up." Other times storms come because of our obedience.

My guess is that you're in one of three places today.

1. You are in a storm right now.

2. You are coming out of a storm.

3. You're about to head into one.

And when storms come, they are often:

- **Sudden.** They come in a split second, seemingly out of nowhere. All it takes is one phone call, a doctor visit, an accident, a job loss or a relational rupture.
- **Severe.** The disciples think they are going to drown and some of you feel like you're going under right now. This had to be some storm. We know at least four of the disciples were fishermen and they're freaking out. John MacArthur points out that "it's a dark day when sailors call on a carpenter to get them out of the storm."
- **Surprising.** I'm often surprised when a storm hits but I shouldn't be because 1 Peter 4:12 says: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

In his book called, "The Pressure's Off," Larry Crabb argues that God is not a vending machine dispensing blessings as rewards for our good behavior. We need to reject a faith that is filled with a formula that says, "If I do 'A,' then God will do 'B' for me."

His plans may be puzzling and they often include problems but they always come with His presence.

3. His plan comes with His presence.

Where is Jesus when the storm comes? He's taking a power nap in the back of the boat! Verse 38 - "But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion..." We see here a picture of the humanity of Jesus. He's tired so he's sleeping and yet He's in total control. He's peaceful even though there are problems taking place; He's sleeping while they're sweating. He's on His throne and He's also in the boat with them. He didn't keep them from the storm, but He went through it with them.

The disciples are totally undone and so they wake Him up and scream out a question, dripping with condemnation: "...Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" This literally reads, "Do we mean so little to you?" Matthew 8:25 captures their emotional consternation: "Save us Lord; we are perishing!"

Before we get too hard on them, don't we often do the same thing when God doesn't do what we want Him to do? It's common to attack His character and question His goodness when bad things erupt in our lives. While we're taking on water and sinking under the waves of worry, God often seems asleep. We see this in Psalm 44:23: "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever." Some of us have echoed the agony found in Psalm 10:1: "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

Some skeptics have pointed out that there's a conflict between Matthew, Mark and Luke because they each report this incident slightly differently. For example, Mark has the disciples crying out, "Teacher!" Matthew uses "Lord!" and Luke has them saying, "Master, Master!" This is not a conflict at all. We all do the same when we're in trouble and cry out every name we can think of: "Teacher, Lord, Master, Master...please help me!"

The greatest storm that night was not on the Sea of Galilee but in the souls of the disciples. One commentator put it like this: "The storm on the sea whipped up a storm of doubt within them that threatened to drown them all."

Friend, don't confuse God's silence with a lack of compassion because He cares deeply for you. 1 Peter 5:7: "Casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you." Commentator Matthew Henry says that the ship that has Christ in it, though it may be tossed, cannot sink. Here's something that may be helpful. Whenever you're sinking under a sea of stress and anxiety, remember this phrase: Don't despair, Christ is there!

It is only in the storm that we understand who Jesus really is. We learn most about Christ when we are in crisis. Storms weren't sent to destroy you, but to develop you.

Since Jesus is who He says is, then we have nothing to fear. His plans for us may be puzzling and they often include problems but

they come with His presence and a demonstration of His power.

4. His plan demonstrates His power.

I love how Jesus slept through the storm but as soon as his children cried out He woke up. It's interesting how moms can sleep soundly but when they hear just a whimper from their newborn they pop out of bed. That's how Beth was with each of our daughters. Mark 4:39 - "And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

It's interesting that Jesus does not specifically answer their question about whether He cared because the answer they needed was to see a demonstration of His power. All Jesus had to do was utter a command and that which He created instantly obeyed.

What a picture! When he stood up all the forces of nature took notice. What He creates, He controls. When he rebuked the howling wind and the roaring waves they bowed before Him. The phrase Jesus uses means to "be muzzled and remain so." He said the same thing in Mark 1:25 when He told the demon to be quiet. Mark is showing us Jesus' power over diseases, the demons and the deep. Psalm 89:9: "You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them."

Psalm 107:29: "He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed."

With a word, Jesus muzzled a major windstorm and stopped millions of gallons of water from moving...instantly! There are really two miracles here. First, He stopped the wind. Second, He stilled the water. Normally if the wind dies down, the waves would keep rolling along but the wind ceased howling and the waves stopped moving immediately. The winds and the waves were synchronized into solemn silence. The sea was as still as the offense of the Chicago Bears! I like what someone said about this passage: "No water can swallow the ship where lies the Master of ocean and earth and skies."

After preaching in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Pastor Fred Luter of New Orleans concluded his sermon with these words: "Always remember that when the storms show up, so does the Savior."

5. His plan always has a purpose.

The greatest storm that night was not on the Sea of Galilee but in the souls of the disciples. There are some things they were not going to get unless they went through some storms. I love that while the disciples accused and attacked Jesus, He responds gently and tenderly to them. This is where truth turns to trust and where learning is translated into living. Jesus gives three purposes behind the plans God has for us.

- **To deal with our fear.** After rebuking the storm, Jesus reproves the disciples by asking some questions in verse 40. Here's the first: "Why are you so afraid?" That word means "timid, to the point of giving up." He had already promised they were going to the other side. They had seen His power in other settings and He was present with them. What more did they need? Jesus asks you and me the same question: Why are you so afraid?
- **To grow our faith.** And here's His second question: "Have you still no faith?" This can be translated, "Do you not yet have faith?" Fear can fillet our faith; and faith can force out our fears. The biggest issue is not that Jesus stopped the storm but that He couldn't find their faith. It's ironic that it's only the wind and the waves that are obeying Him in this passage.

Before moving on, as the Master Teacher, don't miss that Jesus loved to ask questions. I listened to a Breakpoint Commentary this week in which John Stonestreet urges us to utilize questions when interacting with people about cultural issues. Here are some he suggested: What do you mean by that? How do you know that is true? Where did you get this information? How did you come to this conclusion? What if you're wrong?

- **To increase our awe.** One pastor has said that the only thing worse than having a storm outside your boat is to have the Lord Almighty inside your boat. After Jesus asks them two questions, the disciples are very unsettled and in turn ask a question in verse 41 - "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the seas obey Him?'" Luke adds that they were afraid and "they marveled."

You've heard of the calm before the storm, right? This is the storm after the calm. The sea is at rest but the disciples are all churned up. You would think they would chill when the waves were still. The storm made them afraid but the power of Christ made them petrified. The word "fear" literally means, "They feared a great fear; to be stricken with awe and amazement in the presence of one greater than self." They had a combination of fear and reverence. With deity on full display, they are twice as terrified after the storm. If Jesus did that to the forces of nature, what would He do to them?

The Greek word “megas” is used to describe the “great windstorm” in Mark 437 and is used again to describe the “great calm” in verse 39. And verse 41 says they were filled with “great fear” and this is after the great windstorm was replaced with great calm!

I wonder if Psalm 93:4 was going through their minds:

“Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty!”

In short, they didn’t have a category for Christ. One translation says, “What manner of man is this?” He was more frightening than what they had just experienced in the storm. They realize they are in the presence of holiness and came unglued like Isaiah did in Isaiah 6:5: “Woe to me! I am ruined!”

R.C. Sproul says that it was His awesome otherness that made them uncomfortable. That’s exactly what Peter said on another occasion when Jesus filled their nets with so many fish that the boat began to sink: “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ feet and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ (Luke 5:8). The woman who was healed by touching Jesus’ garment had a similar response in Mark 5:33: “But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.” Here’s the deal. Unholy sinners are not comfortable in the presence of the holy Savior.

Andrew Robinson, the worship pastor at Wildwood Church in East Moline, sang at the last Second Winders event. He said something I had not thought of before. The Apostle John, who enjoyed a very close relationship with Jesus, was later exiled to the island of Patmos. The resurrected Jesus appeared to him and we read about his response in Revelation 1:17:

“When I saw Him, I fell at his feet as though dead...”

I wonder if we’ve overemphasized Jesus being our friend at the expense of losing our fear of Him? A reverential awe of God will keep us from being afraid during adversity.

Jesus reveals His plan through this perfect storm.

- 1. His plan may be puzzling.**
- 2. His plan often includes problems.**
- 3. His plan comes with His presence.**
- 4. His plan demonstrates His power.**
- 5. His plan always has a purpose.**

As I reflected on this passage I realized that we’re all in the same boat...pun intended. J. Vernon McGee once said: “What a wonderful lesson we learn here. He puts us into the storms of life in order that we might grow closer to Him and that we might know Him better.”

Life Lessons

Let’s lift out some life lessons from this passage.

1. Christ cares for you and can help in your crisis.

The disciples accused Christ of not caring. Let’s not make that same mistake. This incident reveals both the humanity and the deity of the Lord Jesus. He fell asleep in the stern of the boat; that’s His humanity. He spoke and the storm and the sea were completely calm; that’s His deity. He understands what we’re going through because He is fully man and He can do something about it because He’s fully God.

Hebrews 4:15-16: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Isaiah 43:2: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.”

2. Christ is in complete control of everything.

We don’t know what’s coming but Jesus does. He’s great and He’s good and He is wise. What do you need to trust Him with right now? Chuck Swindoll writes, “Anything under God’s control is never out of control.” Can you trust Jesus in the most threatening of circumstances? Every crisis we go through is really an opportunity to get to know Him better. His sleeping days are over. Psalm 121:3-4: “He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither

slumber nor sleep.”

I came across a quote from Francis Chan a week ago that is quite powerful:

“Can you worship a God who isn’t obligated to explain His actions to you? Could it be your arrogance that makes you think God owes you an explanation?”

3. We all must go through storms to get to the other side.

It’s easy to faithfully worship in fair weather but a lot harder when the hurricanes of life hit. We’re not promised an easy trip but we are guaranteed arrival at our destination. Remember this - the only way to the other side is through the storms. Settle this right now so you’re not surprised when the storms come.

In early Christian art, the church is often depicted as a boat driven upon a perilous sea. Jesus told the disciples to go to other side in verse 35 and in 5:1 we read, “They came to the other side.”

4. If you’re going through a storm you better have Jesus in your boat.

Go back and look at verse 36: “And other boats were with Him.” But only one of them had Jesus in it. Is He in your boat? Is the Lord in your life? Since Jesus can still the winds and the waves He can clobber your addictions, put your marriage back together and lead you into the future! Jesus said, “Let us go over.” He didn’t say, “Let us go under.”

It was about a year after my friend Tim drowned that I was saved. God used that storm to bring me to salvation. How about you?

5. Make sure that Jesus is steering your ship.

Are you allowing Jesus to be commander of your boat? It’s very interesting to read in verse 38 that Jesus was “asleep on the cushion.” The use of the definite article “the” shows us that it was a specific cushion. This cushion was reserved for the captain of the ship. Jesus is in the spot of the steersman. Is He steering your life? Have you given Him control...of everything?

If you have not been saved and you’re not allowing Jesus to steer your life, you are headed into a huge storm on the Day of Judgment.

6. Grow in your awe of Christ.

Settle the fact that life is not about you. Later on, in Matthew 14, the disciples are on the water again and the boat was getting “beaten by the waves.” Jesus comes to them on the water and they become terrified. Peter then walks on the water. I want you to see what happens next in verse 32: “And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.” I’m sure this reminded them of what happened during the storm several months earlier. Only this time they don’t wonder what kind of man Jesus is. Now they get it. Listen to verse 33: “And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

7. Jesus won’t always calm the storm but He will calm you.

The Apostle Paul went through a terrible storm in Acts 27 that the Lord did not calm. Listen. Paul had great faith and he had a shipwreck; the disciples had little faith and the Lord stilled the sea. It all has to do with His sovereign will.

He may not still the storm that you’re in right now but He can still you. He may not always change your circumstances but if you surrender to Him, He will change you in your circumstances.

Warren Wiersbe puts it like this:

“The greatest danger was not the wind or the waves, it was the unbelief in their hearts. Our greatest problems are within us, not around us.”

If you want to settle a spiritual storm in your heart, I invite you to come up front as Pastor Chad sings our closing song called, [**Sometimes He Calms the Storm.**](#) (click title to play song)

*Sometimes He calms the storm With a whispered peace be still
He can settle any sea But it doesn’t mean He will
Sometimes He holds us close And lets the wind and waves go wild
Sometimes He calms the storm And other times He calms His child*

The Power of Touch

Ed Stetzer recently tweeted: “In 5 days: 700 refugees drowned off Greece, 9000 babies were aborted in the U.S., 68 were shot in Chicago...and a gorilla dominated the news.”

Last Saturday a young boy climbed a railing, squeezed through a fence and fell into the mote within the gorilla enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo. A 450-pound gorilla named Harambe dragged the toddler through the water twice and so zoo officials killed the animal. Zoo director Thane Maynard said, “We are heartbroken about losing Harambe, but a child’s life was in danger and a quick decision had to be made.”

This event has set off a heated and even hateful cultural conversation.

Here are some actual headlines...

- Parents Get Death Threats
- Shooting an Endangered Animal is Worse than Murder
- Probe into Possible Criminal Charges

And social media was anything but social...

- How many people supporting the shooting of a gorilla? Shoot the parents.
- SAVE A GORILLA, SHOOT A BAD MOTHER.
- Murdering an endangered gorilla? We are already overpopulated with kids! Where are the stupid parents?
- We have a dead person on our hands.

Let me just say that while it is sad that a beautiful and endangered animal was killed, this animal was not a person. People must always take precedence over animals because we are made in the image of God and thus have great worth and value. Albert Mohler is right when he says that human dignity is at stake in our culture.

So much of our cultural confusion is corrected in the very first book of the Bible. Genesis 1:26-27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ [Human beings have been given dominion over animals] So God created man in his own image, [that’s why abortion, racism and suicide are wrong] in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them [it’s clear that God created our gender].”

And Genesis 2:24 declares that the divine design for marriage is one man and one woman in a covenant relationship for life: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

As we’ve been walking through the Gospel of Mark we’ve been learning that Jesus is both servant and Savior. We’ve seen that Jesus cares for crowds and He cares for individuals. I’m reminded of what He declared in Matthew 12:12: “Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!”

We have established that Jesus is Lord over the deep and the demons and today we’ll discover that He is Lord over disease and death.

Last week we saw that Jesus delivered a man who lived among the dead. He was self-destructing and Satan was also destroying him. After Jesus delivered him, he was deployed to live on mission to his friends and family as he was unleashed to minister to his neighbors and to the nation made up of ten key cities.

Speaking of deployment, I’m thrilled that Kyle and Liesl Parks are in the process of being deployed to serve the youth and young adults of the QCA. They accepted an offer on their home in South Carolina and have also made an offer on a house in Rock Island. We’re still working out the details related to their arrival but Kyle will be going on the Ignite Camping Trip July 8-9 and will also be joining the high schoolers in Colorado July 10-15 for their camp.

A Man in Need

Grab your Bibles and turn to Mark 5:21-43. As I percolated on this passage, I wrote down this summary statement: Jesus came for those who have fame and for those who live in shame. Jesus will receive you whether you are respected or rejected, or somewhere in between. We will see how much Jesus values a man, a woman and a young child.

Mark 5:21 gives us the setting: “And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea.” This crowd was no doubt waiting for his return from the other side of the lake. In the midst of all these

fans, some sincere followers break through and express their belief. We've asked this before but it bears repeating: Are you a fickle fan or a faithful follower?

With crowds of people pressing in on Jesus, Mark 5:22 says: "Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet." We're given the name of this man of distinction. Jairus comes from "Jair," taken from one of Israel's judges and means, "Jehovah Enlightens." This man who had some fame, fell in humility at the feet of Jesus. He's in crisis and needs the help that only Christ can provide. His "child's life was in danger and a quick decision had to be made."

Hear the agony and urgency in Mark 5:23: "And implored Him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.'" It's obvious that position, power and privilege do not exempt one from problems. This dad calls his girl "my little daughter." I understand that as a dad of four endearing daughters. I don't know much Spanish but I used to love hearing a young daughter referred to as "mi hijita" when we lived in Mexico. We know from Luke's account that she is an only child and is dying. Jairus has heard of Jesus performing miracles and maybe even witnessed some and so he's confident that if Jesus just came and touched her she would be healed.

I love Jesus' response in Mark 5:24: "And He went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him." The word "thronged" means to "press closely on all sides."

A Woman With No Name

Almost as soon as we're introduced to Jairus, a nameless woman appears out of nowhere. We know some sad things about her condition.

- **She was suffering.** Check out verse 25: "And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years." The word for discharge is "flowing" which shows that she was hemorrhaging and no doubt suffering from anemia. Verse 26 says that she had "suffered much under many physicians." I find it funny that Dr. Luke leaves this part out and instead gives his summary of her situation in Luke 8:43: "She could not be healed by anyone." By the way, doctors and nurses often get dissed today but I'm thankful for each of you who serve in the medical profession.

A doctor back then trusted sorcery more than the sciences, as he would experiment with curious concoctions like mixing together owl brains and frog livers. Some believed that colds could be cured by kissing the nose of a mule.

- **She was spiritually unclean.** Leviticus 15:25 tells us that a discharge of blood would have made her unclean and unable to gather for corporate worship. In addition, anyone who touched her would be unclean as well. As a result she was shunned and relegated to a lonely and empty life. Her life verse might have been Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead?"

- **She had spent all her money.** Verse 26 says that was broke and she was "no better but rather grew worse." Her disease had left her destitute. She had tried everything and spent all she had. Can any of you relate to her?

- **She was seeking help.** Look at verse 27: "She had heard reports about Jesus and came up behind Him in the crowd and touched his garment." The word for "heard" means, "to hear with attention." The healing power of Jesus gave her hope but there was no way she was going to approach him face-to-face. This woman with no name had too much shame to do that. The best she could hope for was a secret healing. Verse 28 reveals her thinking as she said these words to herself over and over: "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." Luke tells us that she grabbed onto the fringe of his cloak.

Before we go further let me just say that her faith had some superstition in it. Her theology was not well developed but to her credit she brought as much of herself as she could to as much of Jesus as she understood. Imperfect faith in a perfect Savior will always accomplish much. I'm reminded of what Jesus said in Matthew 18:3: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

As soon as she touched his garments, verse 29 tells us what happened: "And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease." I love that this happened immediately and she could tell that she was better. I wonder if she tried to shrink back into the crowd.

Mark 5:30 tells us what happened next: "And Jesus, perceiving in Himself that power had gone out from Him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my garments?'" The reminds me of the title of a book I saw recently: "Questions from the God who needs no Answers." Jesus knew exactly who touched Him but He asked the question for the woman's benefit. I can think of three reasons why he may have done so.

- To enable her to give testimony of what Jesus had done. Belief is personal but must also go public. That's one of the purposes behind baptism – it gives us the opportunity to publically identify with Jesus Christ. Luke 12:8: "And I tell you, everyone who

acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.”

- To build her belief and fortify her faith.
- To show the crowd that she is now clean and is to be accepted back into society. Her shame is now gone. Romans 10:11: “For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’”

The disciples get a bit sassy with the Savior in verse 31: “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” This shows once again that they just don’t get it. They are impatient and don’t understand what just happened. I’m often the same way.

Mark 5:32 describes Jesus searching for the woman: “And He looked around to see who had done it.” The tense is that “he kept looking.” In Mark 5:33 we see that she “came in fear and trembling and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.” She is terrified because she knows that she should not have been in the crowd because of her impurity, much less touching the garments of Jesus. She fears rejection...again.

Don’t miss what happens next. The man with some fame fell down before Jesus and now this woman with shame falls down as well. Listen. It doesn’t matter who you are or what position you hold, your posture before Christ must be one of broken humility and deep reverence. Jesus came for those who have fame and for those who live in shame.

Mark 5:34 tells us that she wasn’t just healed but was also saved: “And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’” I love that He calls her, “daughter.” He does so because she has just entered the family of God through faith. She goes from living with shame to having a name as a daughter of the King! For twelve terrible years she had been a nobody and now she is a somebody!

It was her “faith” that made her well, not something inherent in his clothing. The word “well” is translated as “saved” in other passages and means, “to be kept safe and sound.” She’s told to go in shalom, and to be healed of her disease. She was delivered from her sickness and her sin.

A Dead Daughter

After calling this nameless woman “daughter,” we see in Mark 5:35 that some messengers come from Jairus’ house and report to the man with fame: “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?”

I can’t imagine what Jairus must have been thinking. If it weren’t for the interruption from the woman, Jesus could have already healed his little girl. This delay caused the death of his daughter. Why couldn’t Jesus have come back later and healed the woman? After all, she had been sick for 12 years. What would another 30 minutes matter?

Perhaps you’ve heard this saying: “God is never late; He’s seldom early; He’s always on time.” To which I add: And He can be trusted. So, here’s a question. Are you OK with a divine delay? When God delays it doesn’t mean He doesn’t care; rather, He is weaving His ways and His will in such a way that this delay will result in greater glory for Himself and greater faith for us. Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Delays are really part of God’s divine design and interruptions are part of God’s appointments for us. It was kind of comical when I was working on this message at McDonald’s and was interrupted by a customer who wanted to have a conversation. When I realized that this was God’s appointment for me I was able to share the gospel with her and invite her to Edgewood. I might have missed this if I would have just gotten irritated.

I love the tenderness in verse 36 because Jesus knows this ruler would start falling apart at this news: “Do not fear, only believe.” Literally, He’s saying, “Keep on believing, keep trusting. Stop fearing, only be believing.” Jesus was calling him to have fervent faith in the face of what seemed impossible. Jesus then thins out the crowd in verse 37: “And He allowed no one to follow Him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.”

There were three key elements in Middle Eastern funerals from the first century – the tearing of clothes, hired professional mourners and at least two flutes playing dirges. Funerals were filled with frantic weeping and wailing and loud handclapping. With that as background, let’s imagine the scene laid out in verse 38: “They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.”

Don’t miss the theological depth of what Jesus says next as He redefines death as a temporary condition for the believer: “And when he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.’” For the believer, death is only sleep. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

When Jesus said she was sleeping everyone started jeering at Him. Luke tells us that they all knew she was dead. Look at verse 40: "And they laughed at Him." This word means, "to ridicule, scorn and deride; the laughter of one who feels superior." It's in the imperfect tense, meaning they kept on jeering Him. Psalm 22:7 is a messianic psalm, meaning it's about Jesus: "All who see me mock me." This same idea is behind Nehemiah 2:19: "Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem jeered at us and despised us..."

We shouldn't be surprised when people laugh at us or make fun of our faith. If they jeered at Jesus, they'll do it to you. While people are laughing, Jesus clears them out in Mark 5:40: "But He put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was." Putting them "outside" is the same word used of Jesus clearing the temple of the moneychangers. The word "took" indicates that Jesus may have tenderly put his arms around the parents as he led them into the house.

We see again the tender spirit of the Savior in Mark 5:41: "Taking her by the hand, he said to her, 'Talitha cumi,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'" I love how Jesus gently takes hold of her hand. He did the same thing for Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:21. Mark records the Aramaic phrase, which literally means, "Little lamb, arise!" That is so beautiful!

Mark 5:42: "And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement." Notice that she didn't need any physical therapy and walked around like any normal 12-year-old would. Those who witnessed this miracle were literally "astonished with great astonishment."

Jesus then makes sure to give the family some privacy and doesn't want any selfies taken. Mark 5:43: "And He strictly charged them that no one should know about this, and told them to give her something to eat." Don't miss this tender touch. A miracle brought her to life and a meal would keep her alive. This shows He cares about all our needs, including a missed meal.

Implications and Applications

Let's pull out a few implications and applications from this passage.

1. Start seeing your interruptions as God's appointments.

When things don't go as planned, say a quick prayer that goes something like this: "God, help me not be irritated so I can see the appointment you have for me in this situation."

2. Refuse to attach labels to people according to their relative importance

Jesus came for those who have fame and for those who live in shame.

3. Identify a situation in which you need to stop fearing and start having faith.

See your extremity as God's opportunity to go to work. I like this quote from A.W. Tozer: "As God is exalted to the right place in our lives a thousand problems are solved all at once."

4. Go public with your faith. If you're saved, your next step is baptism.

And then go public in your family, in your neighborhood, among your friends, at your workplace and on your campus. It's time to stop being an undercover Christian.

5. Don't wait for a crisis before you commit yourself to Christ.

Reach out to Jesus in faith and ask Him to deliver you. The named man and the unnamed woman had some things in common – they both were hopeless and humble and they knew where to go for help as they fell down at the feet of Jesus.

When Jesus came in contact with the diseased and the dead, technically He should have been declared unclean. But just the opposite happened. Jesus transferred His purity to their impurity. The discharge of Jesus' blood on the cross cleanses those who have been converted. His righteousness is exchanged for our wretchedness. 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

It wasn't until late this week that the name of the toddler who fell into the moat was revealed. His name is Isaiah and he's named after the prophet from the Old Testament. I found it fascinating that the vitriolic verbiage seemed to lessen once his name was known. He's no longer nameless...and neither are you.

Jesus wants to give you a new nature through the new birth. And He'll give you a new name to blot out your shame. Are you ready to become His daughter or His son? John 1:12 says, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Once you receive Him, He will turn to you and say, "I delight in you, my daughter. I celebrate you, my son."

As a way to remember what Jesus has done for us, He invites us to have a family meal together. We call it communion and it's for His sons and daughters.

We're given some cautions before we participate in 1 Corinthians 11:27-28: "27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

After examining ourselves, we're called to remember what Christ has done for us in verses 23-26: "23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Let's stand and sing the chorus, "Thank You Jesus for the Cross."

Mark 6:7-13

Going with the Gospel

On January 23rd of this year, after \$1 beer night at a hockey game at U.S. Bank Arena in Cincinnati, Jake Strotman and his drinking buddies approached a band of Baptist street preachers. Strotman felt like these preachers were "condemning him" so he let them know what he thought of their preaching: "They were telling me I was going to hell...I didn't understand why they thought they could judge me."

Screaming and cussing was followed by a lot of pushing and shoving. Strotman somehow ended up at the bottom of a pile, in his words, "eating asphalt." He pushed himself up with one hand and planted another hand squarely into the face of the bespectacled eye of Joshua Johnson, who had been preaching the word of God. Johnson's face was bloodied and Strotman was charged with assault.

In late May, Strotman appeared before judge William Mallory. The judge told him that he was looking at 90 days in jail. Strotman sure didn't want to go to jail: "Anything but jail, thought the self-employed salesman of windows, sidings and doors."

The judge then turned to the preacher and said, "I'm trying to get to something reasonable here. And I'll be honest with you guys, sometimes in certain places people don't want to be preached to. You agree with that right?"

Yes, he said, he did.

"I admire the fact that you want to spread the word of God because I'm a religious man, too," the judge said. "Also, the thing about religion, I think it is kind of personal and for me I don't try to impose my religious views on other people except for sometimes in this room."

Have you ever noticed that some people don't want to be preached to? In our passage for today we're going to see that Jesus sent out his disciples on a very personal short-term preaching mission. We're going to learn that when we go with the gospel, some will receive it and others will reject it.

Turn in your Bibles to Mark 6:7-13: "And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, 'Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them."

Before we dive in, it's important to note that this passage contains some unique and specific instructions for the twelve disciples as they were sent out on a one-time mission. This short-term mission trip was designed to teach and train as part of their intense internship (similar to the internship Justin Rumley is having this summer). They had heard a lot of preaching from Jesus and now it was time for them to put it into practice. There are at least four reasons why I believe these instructions are not normative for us

today.

- They were initially sent only to the Israelites. Matthew 10:5-7: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
- The next time they are sent out the restriction of no provisions is reversed. We see this in Luke 23:35-36: “And he said to them, ‘When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?’ They said, ‘Nothing.’ He said to them, ‘But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack...’”
- Later, their mandate is to make disciples “among all the nations” according to Matthew 28:19-20. Acts 1:8 says we’re to start in Jerusalem but not stay there as the gospel is also intended for the “ends of the earth.”
- The early church did not view these initial instructions as normative. Sometimes they ministered in pairs; other times they did not. Paul financed his ministry as a tentmaker. By the way, our newest missionaries were approved on Tuesday night by the deacons. They [I’m leaving their names out for safety reasons] will be targeting an unreached people group of 16 million in India while working at a job as a way to gain credibility and acceptance.

While not prescriptive, we can draw three principles from this passage that have application to our lives today.

1. Teamwork.

Look at Mark 6:7: “And He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two...” The word for “called” has the idea of summoning. The use of “began” gives the sense that Jesus individually commissioned each pair. Interestingly, “send” is the Greek *apostello*, or apostle and means, “to be thrust out.” Remember that this was Jesus’ plan all along. He recruited the twelve to spend time with Him according to Mark 3:14 and to send them out: “that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.” This is a great reminder for us – we gather in order to go!

And he sent them out “two by two.” Jesus used teams of two on at least two other occasions. In Mark 11:1 two disciples were sent to get a colt for Christ and in Mark 14:3 a team of two were told to get a room ready for the Passover meal. Later, Jesus sends out 70 in teams of two (Luke 10:1). John the Baptist sent out two in Luke 7:18 and Paul and Barnabas served as teammates in the Book of Acts. Moses and Aaron are good examples of teamwork in the Old Testament and Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.”

Here are some benefits of teamwork in ministry:

- Greater safety
- Encouragement
- Accountability
- Blending of gifts and abilities to offset the weakness of the other
- While one is preaching, the other can be praying
- They can tag team in a conversation
- It’s a great environment for mutual mentorship
- They can be witnesses to what happens. In John 8:17, Jesus references Deuteronomy 17:6, “In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true.”

I want to give a shout out to all the junior high and high school sponsors for stepping up your teamwork this past year. Props to Greg Johnston for serving the junior high students. We want to particularly thank the tenacious teamwork that Chris and Jamie Rogers have exhibited in leading our high school ministry. Let’s show our appreciation to them right now. Kyle Parks and his marriage partner Liesl, will be moving to the QCA next month as Kyle begins his new role as Youth and Young Adults Pastor on Wednesday, July 6th. The cool thing is that Chris and Jamie will continue serving as teammates on the student ministry team.

I love how God has made each of us members of Team Edgewood. I view my fellow pastors and staff and deacons and trustees and ministry leaders and members and regular attenders as teammates. I try not to say that we have “staff meetings” but rather that we have “team times” together. We serve together as those sent out on mission.

I wonder how this worked out when Jesus organized the disciples into six teams of two. We see how they are paired up in Matthew 10:2-4: “The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of

Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” I wonder how Thomas the doubter got along with Matthew who struggled with dishonesty? Simon probably felt like he got the short straw when he was linked with Judas!

Any of you remember the old A-Team TV show with Mr. T? In one episode, some drug lords hired a bunch of mercenaries to take down the A-Team to no avail. Col. John "Hannibal" Smith (played by George Peppard) looks at their defeated foes and proclaims: "Now, next time you think you wanna take somebody out, pal; don't get yourself a squad, get yourself a team!" The main point is that a team of committed people beats a squad of individuals who don't care about each other.

Friends, if you know Jesus Christ, you are on the A-Team! I love how like-minded ministries are partnering together for gospel proclamation in this church, in the QCA, in our country and all over the world.

When we serve as teammates, spiritual synergy happens. Here's a definition I like: "The working together of two things to produce an affect greater than the sum of the individual efforts." Two or more serving together can do more than working separately.

When Jesus sent out these teams, the last part of verse 7 says that He "gave them authority over the unclean spirits." They were given power and permission to cast out demons. Or to say it another way, they had the right and the might to minister in the name of Jesus. They were able to multiply the ministry by serving in teams and they got to experience the truth of John 14:12: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

When you go with the gospel, some will receive it and others will reject it. The first principle is to exhibit teamwork. The second expectation is to trust.

2. Trust.

That's what's behind the restrictions in verses 8-9: "He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics." The staff was like a walking stick and sandals would protect their feet as they walked. Jesus didn't want them to bring bread or a backpack or a wallet because He wanted to teach them how to trust. They were to go lean and mean so they might lean on the Almighty.

One of the best examples of this is the Contreras family who serve on our Go Team in the inner city of Fresno. I had the joy of meeting with them last February. While most missionaries live on little, they have taken a vow of poverty so they live on a lot less than other missionaries do. When I asked them why they told me they want to live just like the people they are called to reach. Since their neighbors live in poverty, so do they. By the way, Manual and Kim will be our keynote speakers at our Engage Missions Festival in October.

It was time for these teams to put Matthew 6:31-33 into practice: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

I've never been known for traveling light when our family heads out on a trip. Even though I have four daughters I normally bring more stuff than anyone else. My problem is that I put packing off as long as possible and then in a panic I just empty my dresser drawers into my suitcase. I have my suitcase on our bedroom floor right now in anticipation of our journey out to Virginia for the impending birth of our grandson [this is where you're supposed to say that I look too young to be a grandpa]. Beth keeps telling me that I don't have to bring a lot because we can wash clothes when we're there. This has helped me reduce the volume of my stuff...a little.

I love what George Mueller once said, "If the Lord fails me this time, it will be the first time." Jesus wants them [and us] to learn that He can be counted on. The Israelites were in a similar situation in the wilderness for 40 years when they found out that their clothes and sandals did not wear out. Deuteronomy 29:6 tells us why: "That you may know that I am the LORD your God."

I'm reminded of something I first heard twenty years or so ago: "Attempt something so great for God that unless He is in it, it's doomed to failure."

The disciples were told to not only travel light but to also serve with a sense of urgency. I wonder if their minds went back to the instructions given by God to the Israelites in Exodus 12:11: "In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on

your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover."

A couple weeks ago the pastoral team had a one-day retreat in which we focused on the importance of institutionalizing urgency. We began by listening to a podcast from Craig Groeschel. He made several good points but I want to share just one – "Attack, don't yak." He challenged us with this statement, "As your organization grows, movement naturally slows. As an organization ages, it moves from a bias for action to a bias for discussion." We then discussed how we must live with a sense of urgency both personally and pastorally. Each team member is now working on several "stretch goals" that we are trusting God for.

Jesus gives some additional instructions in verse 10: "And he said to them, 'Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there.'" They weren't to hop over to a bigger house with more amenities. The temptation is always to seek comfort and luxury but God wants us to learn the secret of contentment. 1 Timothy 6:6: "But godliness with contentment is great gain."

Here we see the importance of believers offering hospitality and financial support to missionaries. A few months ago, Beth and I decided to save a little more from my paycheck each week and then ask God how we can bless a missionary or ministry with it. We've already been able to give to Moody Radio and to World Relief in ways we would not have been to if we had not started this plan.

I listened to a podcast recently featuring Brad Lomenick and heard him talk about H3 Leadership:

- Be Humble
- Stay Hungry
- Always Hustle

As the disciples demonstrated teamwork and grew in their trust of God, I'm sure they remained humble and hungry as they hustled to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Would you say that you are humble and hungry and that you hustle to share the gospel?

When we go with the gospel, some will receive it and others will reject it. First, serve with a spirit of teamwork. Second, grow in trust. Finally, make sure you are giving testimony about Jesus Christ.

3. Testimony.

A quote often attributed to Francis of Assisi goes like this: "Preach the gospel. And if necessary, use words." While that might be cute and clever it's not biblically correct. The gospel must always be communicated with words.

Jesus is preparing his teams for rejection in verse 11: "And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." This graphic display has its roots in Jewish culture. When a Jewish man or woman would travel into a pagan land, when they would return they would shake the dust off their clothes and sandals as a way to keep the contamination from coming back with them. Here's the message – anyone who refused to listen to the preachers sent by Jesus was as unclean in God's sight as Gentiles were in theirs.

For Jesus to tell his disciples to do this to the Jewish people when they reject the gospel would have been extremely offensive. Matthew 10:15 ratchets this up when Jesus says, "It will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town." Here's the principle: the more revelation you've received, the more responsibility you have to repent and believe. To whom much is given, much is required. All Sodom and Gomorrah had was the testimony of wayward Lot and they were judged. How much more will they be?

Don't miss the point. The disciples were to do this with a broken heart and not with a sense of glee. The act of shaking the dust off was a warning that to persist in rejecting Jesus was to face judgment. This was actually a merciful act designed to shock them into the reality that they were headed to hell.

It's important to keep in mind that a few will receive and most will reject. Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Some will open their homes with hospitality and others will close their fists with hostility. Some will listen when you preach and others will lash out. Some will accept and others may assault you. That happens right here in this country but is even more evident in other places where persecution can lead to loss of lifestyle and life itself.

Our daughter Megan watched a video series this spring called, "I am N" and was really impacted by believers in Iraq that are being persecuted. Radical Muslims (ISIS) have spray-painted the Arabic letter ن, or "N," on the homes and businesses of Christians, who were given a choice to convert to Islam, leave or die. These courageous believers refused to deny their faith, and more than 100,000 fled with little more than the clothes on their backs. For more information about this, check out the Voice of the Martyrs at

persecution.com. We have some "I-AM-N" bracelets on the Resource Table if you want to pick one up. We'll be spending more time on this in November and will have additional resources available then. I put a link on the Sermon Extras tab if you want to find out more information or you can talk with Chasity Holmquist.

Allow me to say something very bold. Comfortable Christianity won't change the world! In John 16:33 Jesus made this promise: "In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Mark 13:3 says, "And you will be hated by all for my name's sake." Paul sums it up when he writes in 2 Timothy 3:12: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

After being restricted about what they can take with them and being told that many will reject them, these six teams trusted and boldly gave testimony about Jesus Christ by calling people to repentance in verse 12: "So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent." They were told what to take, where to stay and what to say. Even after knowing that some would receive and some would reject, they still preached repentance.

To repent means, "a change of mind that leads to a change of action, where you can say, 'I will stop doing the things I should not do and I will begin to do the things I should do.'"

Check out what God says in Ezekiel 18:30: "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin." In Mark 1:4, we read that John the Baptist preached repentance. The first words out of Jesus' mouth in Mark 1:15 were: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." In Peter's preaching in Acts 2:38 he declared these words, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ..."

Fellow teammates in the gospel, I'm grieved by how much the gospel message has been watered down in our culture today. To borrow a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we live in an age of "easy believism." Check out these words from his book called, "The Cost of Discipleship." "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ..." What a contrast to the drivel of the health, wealth and happiness message emanating from many pulpits and screens today as the "name it and claim" gospel gains ground. This message is popular. If you preach repentance you might get punched in the face...or worse.

Mark 6:7-13 helps us see that while the disciples preached repentance they were also committed to restoration. They were courageous communicators and they were filled with compassion for those inflicted by Satan and by sickness. We must do the same, right? We're called to preach out and to reach out: "And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." The disciples learned that Jesus' power extended beyond His personal presence because they were now representing Him. These exorcisms and healings served to confirm their message. Matthew 10:40: "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

This is a summer of missions here at Edgewood. We celebrated World Relief and Pregnancy Resources last weekend. Our Puerto Rico team leaves on July 16. Jim and Amy Smith from Japan and Safe Families will be featured next month as we learn about using our homes for hospitality. We'll hear about Youth Hope and from Sam and Blessy Thomas from India in August.

Edgewood is all about missions – both short-term and long-term and everything in between. We have missionaries that have been part of our Go team for 6 days and others for over 66 years!

Interview Questions for George King

1. Is it true that you have been serving as a missionary since 1950? I think that would make you the longest serving EBC missionary! I've been told that God has used you to start over 80 churches in Japan. Could you please share briefly how God drew you to Japan?
2. We've been learning about the importance of teamwork in ministry. How has God used you and Ellen as a team?
3. You and Ellen have had some health issues recently. How is God using this to increase your trust in Him?
4. We'd love to celebrate how God is working in Japan. Could you share a story of how God is using one of the Japanese preachers that you helped train to give testimony about Christ in order to grow His church?

When we go with the gospel, some will receive it and others will reject it. Serve as teammates. Learn to trust. And give a clear testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ as you call people to repentance.

Action Steps

The first three action steps I want to suggest are principles the Lord has prompted me to put into practice. I thought if I shared them with you I'll have greater accountability and they may end up spurring you on to love and good deeds.

1. Tell yourself everyday that you're getting older and that life is but a vapor.

Don't waste your life. Don't coast. Live with urgency, not complacency. Finish strong.

2. Tell yourself that everyone you meet is either going to heaven or to hell.

Contemplate the horrors of hell and do all you can to help people go to heaven.

3. Attempt to meet one new person every day and have a spiritual conversation with them.

This will push you out of your comfort zone. I know it does for me.

4. Live on mission.

See yourself as sent to your family, your neighbors, your co-workers and your classmates. I listened to a sermon from Matt Chandler on Friday in which he said, "You are uniquely wired and uniquely placed for unique opportunities." 2 Corinthians 5:20: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

5. Find a partner to minister with.

6. Pray for and support missionaries.

One pastor says that we only have three options when it comes to missions – Go, Send, or Disobey.

Let's pick up the story from the courtroom that I began with...

Just before the judge sentenced the man who had assaulted the preacher, he turned to the defendant and said, "I'm open to suggestions."

With visions of cell bars dancing in his head, Strotman nearly interrupted the judge: "Your honor, if I may, I would be more than happy to serve a church of your choosing."

The judge then turned to the preacher and said, "So for his penance, what if I make him go to your church a number of Sunday services?" The preacher loved the idea.

The judge ended up sentencing Strotman to attend 12 consecutive Sunday services at Morning Star Baptist Church for their entire 90-minute services. He must get the weekly program signed by the minister. That's 18 hours of solid Baptist praising and preaching!

He also paid \$480 in court fines and a \$2,800 lawyer bill...I wonder if he'll anything left for the offering?

Listen to what Strotman said about his sentence: "Three months, that's not that bad...I'm going to listen with both my ears and keep my mouth shut...Then, maybe I'll try to sell them some windows."

I can't wait to hear how this story ends. That will be quite a testimony about how God saved him through the preaching of the preacher he punched!

Some of you have heard a lot of preaching...its time now for you to personally repent and receive Jesus Christ!

Closing Song: "Facing a Task Unfinished"

Mark 6:45-56

The Drawing Power of Jesus

Have you ever noticed that grandparents love to show pictures of their grandchildren to every one they meet? It's like they can't help it. I've never understood that so now that Beth and I are first-time grandparents I'm going to resist inundating you with pictures of our grandson named Philip...OK, that didn't last. Have I shown you pictures of Pip?

Pictures capture moments in time and help us remember key events. Two weeks ago, Pastor Ed gave us a snapshot of John the Baptist and challenged us to always speak the truth, no matter the consequences. Last weekend Pastor Tim gave us a picture of how Jesus multiplied a young lad's lunchable into a meal for a multitude in order to teach us that with Christ the impossible is always possible.

Mark 6:43 tells us what happened after every one was done eating: “And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.” Each of the disciples filled a doggy bag to remind them of what Jesus had done.

As we dive into our passage today we’re going to be served a seven course spiritual meal as we simply walk through these verses and allow God’s Word to feed us. Are you ready to eat?

1. Obey even when you don’t understand.

Let’s begin in Mark 6:45: “Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.” Mark loves to use the word “immediately” to help us see that Jesus moves quickly from one encounter to the next. In this case it seems rather abrupt, doesn’t it? After this amazing miracle, we read that Jesus “made his disciples get into the boat.” This is the word for “compelled” and has the idea of the disciples being pushed into the boat. In Matthew 8:18, it says that Jesus “gave orders” to them.

Too many of us want to know all the details before we decide to obey. It’s like we have to figure out the why instead of just saying, “God, whatever you want me to do, I’ll do it.” I’m sure this doesn’t make sense to the disciples but frankly it doesn’t have to. John 6:14-15 reveals that the people wanted “to take Jesus by force” and make Him king. Jesus deploys the disciples and then he dismisses the crowd because He doesn’t want any part of a political coup.

Are you struggling with obedience today? Is there anything you’re resisting simply because it doesn’t make sense to you? Keep Isaiah 55:8-9 in mind: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” You may be spiritually stuck simply because you’re demanding to understand before you’ll obey.

2. Jesus prays for you when you can’t pray for yourself.

Look at Mark 6:46: “And after He had taken leave of them, He went up on the mountain to pray.” We saw earlier in Mark 1:35 that it was the custom of Christ to meet with His Father in prayer: “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” He unplugged from others in order to plug into prayer.

The Bible says that there are at least three things that Jesus prays for.

- For our faith to not fail. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”
- That we stay away from sin and Satan. Jesus prays for His followers in John 17:15: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”
- That we experience undivided unity. The heart of Jesus is for harmony among the family of faith as seen in John 17:20-21: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [that’s you and me] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” When we exhibit oneness, our witness to the world will be powerful and palpable.

I attended a community-wide prayer time last Sunday night at Word of Life Church in Rock Island. It was put together in response to the racial tension in our country and in the Quad Cities. Approximately 100 people of various races attended, including pastors from many different churches. I had the privilege of being one of the pastors to lead in prayer and started by reading Ephesians 2:14: “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...”

We interceded for the African American community and we prayed for Law Enforcement. Several white pastors prayed and then an African American pastor cried out for God to bring repentance and revival to our churches and the whole room exploded with applause and exclamations of Amen.

Since Jesus made prayer a priority, we must do the same. In our team time on Tuesday, I challenged our staff to pray more. I’m calling for more prayer at EBC. When we gather in groups, let’s pray. When we meet as classes, let’s pray. When we talk on the phone, end your conversation with prayer. We’ll be focusing on prayer on Sunday nights this fall. We’ve signed Edgewood up to be a host site for a nationwide simulcast for women called, “Cry Out Prayer” on Friday, September 23. Bill and Myrna Orris’ class has

been meeting for prayer on Tuesday nights and had an extended time of intercession this past Sunday afternoon. Prayer must permeate all we do.

Let me be clear. The problems in our country won't be solved by politicians, or by people protesting, but only by prayer. Social transformation will only come about when the church is spiritually transformed. I read an article this week called, "Spiritual Awakening Brings Societal Transformation" by Bob Bakke. Here's his conclusion after reflecting on the impact of the Great Awakening in the early 1800s: "Time after time, in nation after nation, the pattern is the same. When the Holy Spirit moves, lives are transformed. And when those transformed lives start loving others, serving with compassion, adopting God's priorities, and sharing the gospel boldly, the surrounding community starts to change."

Tony Evans, an evangelical African American pastor, wrote an article for the Washington Post this week in which he said,

"Our troubles can be traced directly to ineffective Christians...there needs to be a recalibrating of many of our churches to the unified purpose of the kingdom of God...unless the church steps forward collectively to fulfill its God-given role of influencing the conscience of our culture, our country will keep spiraling downward into the depths of fear and hate."

So, let's pray and let's take great comfort in the fact that Jesus is praying for us. Hebrews 7:25: "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Romans 8:34 says this about Jesus: "who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

Let's pray right now. As you know, there was another terrorist attack in France Thursday night, leaving over 80 dead. Our world seems out of whack and people are nervous about what might happen next. It's time for us to respond with the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First, we're to obey when we don't understand and second, let's remember that Jesus is praying when we can't pray for ourselves. That leads to the third course.

3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be.

Look at Mark 6:47: "And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land." It's now getting dark and the disciples are out in the deep water. We know this from Matthew 14:24, which says that they were a "long way from the land." This was just supposed to be a short shoreline cruise and now they are way off course. I wonder if some of the disciples started singing: "Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip, that started from this tropic port, aboard this tiny ship. The mate was a mighty sailor man, Peter, brave and sure. 12 passengers set sail that day for a three-hour tour. The weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed..."

Some of you feel like you're in deep water today. As a society we seem to be out on the sea, a long way from solid ground. But the disciples are together. This was no time for arguing or fighting. It was a time to pull together and not dwell on their differences.

Team, we're all in the same boat, aren't we? In order to demonstrate this, I'd like you to stand right now and reach out and grab someone's hand. If you're on the end of a pew, go ahead and cross the aisle and take someone's hand. The person you are now touching is made in the image of God. He or she may be a different gender than you, belong to a different political party, represent a different generation, from a different community or state, live in a different size house than you, or have different colored skin than you do. You might be in management and the person you are touching could belong to a union. You might be a Cardinals fan and you're holding the hand of a Cubs fan or you might be a Packers fan and the poor guy next to you roots for the Bears.

This is a bit uncomfortable, isn't it? Don't let go yet. It's time to repent of any smug feelings of superiority and all racist thoughts, attitudes, words and actions. Here are a couple practical steps to take this week.

- Have a conversation with someone of a different skin color. Let's enter into awkward conversations by intentionally moving toward someone who looks different than we do. For those of us who are white, let's tell a person of color that we care about them. I've been doing that this week and it has led to some wonderful discussions. I introduced myself to a black man at the Mobile Ultrasound Van Dedication on Friday and asked him what message I could give to my church. He smiled and suggested that we all work on empathy. I talked to someone who lives on the west end of Rock Island and she told me that her community is filled with fear and some are really angry right now. Let's face it. Edgewood is up "on the hill" and we're not as connected to the west end of Rock Island and Davenport as we should be.

- Thank a Law Enforcement officer for what he or she does. I went up to three guys from the sheriff's department when I was at La Rancherita for lunch on Wednesday and told them that pastors in this community met to pray for them this past Sunday night. They smiled and thanked me profusely.

In a sermon I preached on rooting out racism last year, I made this appeal: "Let's make Edgewood ethnically and racially diverse and yet harmonious and united. This is a place of grace for discussions about race. We gather together no matter our skin color or background. We grow together because we can't grow alone. We give to each other because of what we've been given. And we go with the gospel to people who are different from us because the dividing wall of hostility has been knocked down by the gospel. That includes the nations living next door as God has brought refugees to us and it also includes our neighbors in the QCA and the nations around the world." OK, you can stop holding hands now.

1. Obey when you don't understand.
2. Jesus prays for you when you can't pray for yourself.
3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be.

I love this next morsel of truth...

4. Jesus sees you when you can't see Him.

The disciples are a long way from shore and they can't see the Savior. The crowds have dispersed and Jesus is by Himself praying and yet Mark 6:48 says: "And He saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them." Let's ponder an obvious point. Jesus sent them into this storm on purpose. Beware of preachers and authors who tell you that it is never God's will for the child of God to suffer or go through hard times.

We know from John's account that the disciples were three to four miles from land and yet Jesus could see that...

- They were in pain and not making much progress. The word "painfully" means, "to torment and torture." They were not making much headway but they were rowing hard. I wonder if one of the upbeat disciples borrowed a line from Dory in Find Nemo: "Rowing, rowing, just keep rowing."
- The wind was against them. In John's account we read this is a "great wind" that was contrary to them, kind of like the storm that blew through here on Wednesday afternoon. The Christian life is not always smooth sailing, is it? While we have some mountain top experiences, like our Ignite singles group experienced when camping last weekend, and what our junior highers felt at Camp Forest Springs two weeks ago and how our high schoolers felt who just returned from Colorado late Friday night, life is actually difficult and dark down in the valley. Blessings come in the midst of burdens and battles and buffetings. Acts 14:22 says, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Take comfort that the Savior sees you when you're struggling. You have not been forgotten or abandoned. 1 Peter 5:7: "Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

Let's summarize.

1. Obey when you don't understand.
2. Jesus prays for you when you can't pray for yourself.
3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be.
4. Jesus sees you when you can't see Him.

Next, we see that Jesus comes to us when we're in crisis...but not always on our timetable.

5. Deliverance is often delayed until it's the darkest.

Look at the second half of verse 48: "And about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea..." There is no doubt the disciples would have wanted Jesus to bail them out earlier but Jesus waited until His perfect time. The fourth watch took place between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. If you put the timing together, the disciples had been straining against the wind and the waves for 8 or 9 hours, and they were getting nowhere.

They can't get to Jesus but He makes His way to them. Don't you love that He knew exactly where they were? To see Jesus walking on the sea should have taken their minds to Job 9:8: "Who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea"

and Psalm 77:19: "The Lord's way was in the sea and His paths in mighty waters."

I'm sure that gave the disciples quite a fright to see Jesus walking on the water. I learned this week that there's a lizard that can run on water. Zoologists call him the "Jesus Christ Lizard." I've seen Lexi Kargl and the Backwater Gamblers ski on water, but I've never seen a man walk on water. Have you?

Jesus comes to the disciples at their point of deepest need at the darkest time of night when they are the most discouraged. Have you ever experienced that?

→ Missionary Interview. This summer we're shining the spotlight on what God is doing around the globe through our Go Team partners. We have a team in Puerto Rico right now and we'll hear from them in two weeks. Today we have Jim Smith with us from Japan.

- Can you describe the ministry God has given you and Amy in Japan?
- How did God use your internship at EBC to equip you?
- We've just discovered in our passage that Jesus sees us even when we can't see Him. How has this truth encouraged you?
- Can you share a story about how God delivered a Japanese man or woman during their darkest time?

We tend to think that our biggest problem is whatever we're facing right now. Jesus wants us to know that all of our answers are found in Him.

6. Your greatest need is to see Jesus for who He is.

Go back to the end of verse 48 and let's pick up a curious phrase: "...He meant to pass by them." What does that mean? Was He intending to just walk on by? Actually, this is the same language used in Exodus 33:19 when God said that He would make His goodness "pass before" Moses and then proclaim His name as "the Lord." Jesus was not trying to hide His identity but was actually revealing His glory and goodness.

Verse 49 and the first part of verse 50 tells us that when the disciples see Jesus they think he's a water Pokémon, or something like that: "But when they saw Him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw Him and were terrified..." You've heard of the Pokémon Go craze, haven't you? People have been coming into our parking lot looking for Pokémon so we decided to welcome them on our sign. I introduced myself to a teenager Friday morning when she was riding in our lot.

The word for "ghost" is phantasma, or phantom. It was a common cultural belief that to see a ghost was a sign that death was imminent. This was not a little whimper as the phrase "cry out" refers to a shrieking scream from someone thrown into deep panic.

What do you think the disciples' biggest need is at this point? Is it to have the storm die down? Is their biggest need to get to shore? Is it to feel better about themselves so they can have their best life now? Listen. The number one thing they need is to increase their awe of the Almighty. Jen Wilken puts it like this: "Our primary problem is not a lack of self-worth. It's that we lack awe. Don't tell me who I am until you have caused me to gaze in awe at 'I AM.'"

Let's lock in now to the last phrase of verse 50 where we read that Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." The phrase, "take heart" means, "to be brave, get a grip." Notice that we're not called to draw on something within us but rather to lean on the Lord. He doesn't say, "You are amazing and strong and incredible" but rather, "Take heart; it is I."

Jesus is using the emphatic personal pronoun that would remind the disciples of Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" Jesus is equating Himself with Yahweh Himself as we saw in our recent sermon series, "Metaphors of the Messiah." I love John 8:58: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" He's really saying something like this, "There's no need to fear because I AM is here!"

This week Ray Pritchard posted this on his blog: Twenty years ago Dr. E. V. Hill preached a powerful sermon at a Promise Keepers gathering in Chicago...on just two words: "God is." He said it over and over again. He whispered it and he shouted it. He illustrated it, declared it, proclaimed it, and dared anyone to deny it. It wouldn't seem likely that you could preach that long on just two words, but he did, and when you think about it, you could preach a lot longer when your topic is as profound as "God is." Once you get it settled in your heart that "God is," a lot of other problems will be solved as well.

By the way, in Mark's account we don't read of Peter getting out of the boat to walk on the water. You can read about that in

Matthew. I think Mark leaves it out because Peter is the one giving an account of the message and miracles of Jesus. Peter has grown in humility and doesn't want the attention or maybe it's because he doesn't want to be reminded that he sank when he took his eyes off Jesus. Say all you want about Peter, at least he got out of the boat! As John Ortberg says, "If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat."

There's one more morsel to chew on today.

7. Be on guard against a hard heart.

Have you ever wondered how the disciples could be so dense? They've just witnessed the feeding of thousands but they haven't connected the dots. We're the same way aren't we? God has been faithful in the past but we forget about that in the present. Check out verses 51-52: "And He got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loves, but their hearts were hardened."

To be "utterly astounded" means to be bewildered beyond belief or literally, "to leave one's mouth wide open in surprise." Jesus walked on the water and then the wind ceased. Because they forgot to look at their doggy bags filled with leftovers, they didn't think the Lord could help them in the storm. Tragically, it says, "their hearts were hardened."

Listen. If you don't lock in and learn what the Lord is trying to teach you, it's likely that you'll get hardened. Hebrews 3:13 urges us, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

It's interesting that the disciples' hearts were hardened but when the boat hits the shore, we read that the people in general were humble and hungry for help in verses 53-56: "When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well."

So here's a question. Is your heart hard or is it hungry? I'm going to put the preaching points up on the screen and you pick one that you most need to focus on this week.

1. Obey even when you don't understand
2. Jesus prays for you when you can't pray for yourself
3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be
4. Jesus sees you when you can't see Him
5. Deliverance is often delayed until it's the darkest
6. Your greatest need is to see Jesus for who He is
7. Be on guard against a hard heart

When I see pictures of our grandson Pip I'm reminded of God's faithfulness. What do you carry around to remind you of the power of Jesus over your problems? God is on the move. Will you join Him?

Closing Song: "Amazed"

Mark 7:1-13 **Holiness Without Hypocrisy**

More than 200 years ago, Edward Gibbon wrote a six-volume series called, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He spent 20 years studying the Roman Empire to find out how a nation that was so great suddenly imploded.

Interestingly, the first volume was published in 1776, the year our country was born. Gibbon listed five primary reasons for the collapse.

1. The rapid increase of divorce, with the undermining of the sanctity of the home, which is the basis of society.
2. Higher and higher taxes; and the spending of public money on bread and circuses.
3. The mad craze for pleasure, with sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.

4. The building of gigantic armies to fight external enemies, when the most deadly enemy, the decadence of the people, lay within.
5. The decay of religion; faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to guide it.

This should be a sober warning that we are repeating many of the same patterns that wrecked the Roman Empire. I asked Justin Rumley, our intern, to look up some stats that relate to each of these, but realized that the connection to our culture is more than obvious. I want to focus on the last one, the fact that our faith can fade into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to guide it. Instead of being moved by the Majesty, we can end up just going through the motions. We can so easily focus on religion and not relationship, which leads to pretenders in the pews.

BTW, when I hear someone say that they don't come to church because it's filled with hypocrites, I often smile and say something like this: "Oh, don't let that stop you...come and join us, we have room for one more!"

We grow tired of people saying one thing and living something that's completely opposite, don't we? According to the dictionary, a hypocrite is "a person who pretends to have beliefs or practices which he or she does not actually possess." As used in the Bible, the term comes from ancient Greek theater, where one actor would often play two parts. When saying something humorous, he would hold up a mask with a smiley face [hold up]; when playing a tragic part, he would hold up a mask with a sad face [hold up]. A good actor could imitate the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character he was portraying [hold up mask of Pastor Ed]. The word literally means, "One who hides behind a mask."

How then can we fight this? How can we grow in holiness without giving into hypocrisy? We're going to look at an encounter Jesus had with some religious dudes and learn that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. That's exactly what Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." That's one of the reasons I like our parenting class for mothers called, Entrusted with a Child's Heart. The heart is always the heart of the matter. BTW, we will be having a parenting seminar on October 22nd for moms and dads.

Hypocrisy concentrates on the external while holiness starts on the inside. The religious leaders were focused on having clean hands; Jesus was all about having a clean heart. Let's walk through Mark 7:1-13 and see how Jesus handles unholy hypocrites.

Here are a few observations before we dive in.

1. Much of Mark's material focuses on what Jesus did; chapter 7 is filled with what He said. To say it another way, much of this gospel records the miracles of Jesus. In these verses we get to hear His message.
2. From this point forward in Mark's gospel we see the popularity of Jesus begin to decline. Moving toward the final year of His life, Jesus pours more time into the disciples while the religious leaders ramp up their confrontation. As Jesus exposes their superficial spirituality, they become more agitated and attack Him relentlessly to discredit Him and eventually send Him to death.
3. The word "tradition" is used six different times in this passage (Mark 7:3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13). While tradition can be a good thing, Jesus is going to show us that tradition must be subservient to Scripture, not the other way around.
4. Mark 7:7 is the key verse that will help us unpack this section: "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." The word "vain" means groundless, invalid, and hypocritical. We don't want our worship to be worthless, do we?

With that as background, here's a simple outline that captures the flow of thought:

1. Confrontation (Mark 7:1-5)
2. Condemnation (Mark 7:6-9)
3. Correction (Mark 7:10-13)

Buckle up because this is a head-on collision between Christ and the spiritual status quo. It's about to get messy. Let's look first at this confrontation between the Lord and a bunch of legalists as recorded in Mark 7:1-5. We can pull out some truths that apply to us as well.

Confrontation

1. Legalists love other legalists.

We saw earlier in Mark 3:22 that the scribes came from Jerusalem to confront Jesus but now they form a posse with the Pharisees in verse 1: “Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem.” The “Pharisees” are literally the “separated ones” and the “scribes” are the interpreters of the Law. One of their jobs was to copy and preserve the Scriptures.

The Pharisees and scribes are the religious experts of the day and they “gather” together to team up against Jesus. We emphasize the importance of gathering with God’s people for worship but there are other ways people gather that are not so good. These men made a two-day trip from Jerusalem, the center of spirituality. One commentator refers to them as, “legalistic, self-righteous, hypocritical phony members of the religious establishment.”

2. Legalists look for lawbreakers.

If you look hard enough, you can always find something to get upset about. The Pharisees and Scribes not only gather together, they play “gotcha” with the followers of Jesus in Mark 7:2: “They saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is unwashed.” Does this mean that the disciples were practicing bad hygiene by not washing up before dinner? No, something deeper is going on.

I love how Mark helps his readers understand more about this in Mark 7:3-4. Do you see the parenthesis around these verses as he gives some cultural background to those who are not Jewish? Remember that Mark’s primary audience is made up of Gentiles living in the Roman Empire: “(For the Pharisees and all [everyone bought in] the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)”

The word “properly” means, “diligently, carefully, frequently and vigorously.” And there was a certain way they had to wash their hands.

→ Demonstrate washing hands. [Ask for a volunteer] Someone would take a jar or pitcher and pour water onto a person’s hands. The person had to have his fingers pointing up. Next, he would point his fingers down while more water was poured over them. Then the person would take his fist and rub the other hand.

The word “holding” refers to grasping firmly. They are obstinately adhering to “the tradition of the elders.” Is it a bad thing to wash one’s hands before eating? Not at all. I should probably do it more than I do. But here’s what happened. The Bible never says that everyone must do this. The only reference I could find was for priests to wash their hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting in Exodus 30:19.

What began as something good became a tradition that ended up binding and blinding the people to what really mattered. John MacArthur helped me see these “traditions of the elders” were eventually put into the Mishnah, which was a collection of oral traditions. Incidentally, the Mishnah has over 35 pages devoted to washing alone! These regulations were then put in the Gemara, which was like a commentary. The Mishnah and the Gemara were then combined to form the Talmud. The Rabbis in Babylon created a Talmud four times larger than the Jerusalem Talmud.

Notice that these religious mask-wearers not only washed their hands but they observed “many other traditions.” They focused on cleaning cups and couches, as well as their pots and pans.

With that as background verses like Luke 11:46 take on more meaning when Jesus said: “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.” In contrast to this, Jesus makes a wonderful offer in Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

3. Legalists lecture the Lord.

Serving as judge and jury, these hypocritical “holy men” ask a question meant to discredit the disciples and Jesus himself in Mark 7:5: “And the Pharisees and scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’”

Condemnation

I love that Jesus doesn’t answer their question about tradition but instead goes right to Scripture as He lays some hurt on them in

verse 6: “And He said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophecy of you hypocrites...’” The word “well” means “rightly” or “suitably.”

And then quoting the Greek translation of Isaiah 29:13, Jesus directly applies this stinging Scripture to them in the second half of verse 6 and verse 7: “As it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’”

Here are some things we can learn from Jesus’ response.

- 1. Always go to Scripture and apply it to life today.** One of the things I admire about Billy Graham is how frequently he uses this phrase when he preaches: “The Bible says...” Here Jesus takes Isaiah and applies it directly to those playing spiritual charades.
- 2. Resist adding or subtracting from Scripture.** Revelation 22:18: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.”
- 3. It’s easy to say or sing something and not really mean it.** Our lives don’t always match what comes across our lips.
- 4. Scripture must always take supremacy over tradition.** Several well-known groups like Catholics, Mormons and Muslims put tradition on an equal or higher level than Scripture.

We have to watch ourselves as well because we don’t want to let our preferences or traditions have more weight than God’s Word. By the way, this helps us process change, doesn’t it? We’re making some changes to the child check-in process, moving Guest services and making a “Go” Display in the south hallway. Change is difficult for some of us but it’s not a biblical issue, is it? Pastor Tim and I want to change the name of our Life Groups and ABF classes to Growth Groups to more closely align with our grow value. That’s a change but it’s not a biblical issue. Right?

To make sure they don’t miss His message, Jesus then pivots from Isaiah and applies it to each of them personally. Listen for the word “you” in verse 8: “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” To “leave” means to “dismiss and let go.” They’ve dissed the commands of God and instead they “hold” or “grasp” to the tradition of men.

Mark 7:9 says they’ve not only left God’s commands but they have actually rejected them: “And He said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the command of God in order to establish your tradition!’” The phrase “fine way” is like Jesus is saying they’ve done a nice job of slicing away the Scriptures so they can savor what is important to them.

These unholy hypocrites begin by confronting Jesus. That quickly turns into Jesus condemning them. In verses 10-13 we see how Jesus corrects them, and us.

Correction

Jesus is not done exposing their legalistic laws and hypocritical beliefs and behavior. Notice again that He bases everything He says on Scripture. That’s what we strive to do as well. When someone asks me why Edgewood believes that baptism by immersion is a step of obedience to be followed after one believes in Christ, I quickly add that no one should do this just because a church says to do it but because that’s what the Bible teaches. Our “Taking the Plunge” booklet walks through every passage in the New Testament on baptism and then draws application from it.

Look at Mark 7:10 where Jesus quotes the fifth commandment: “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother...’” This is found in Exodus 20:12 and is stated positively. One chapter later, in Exodus 21:17 and again in Leviticus 20:9, Jesus quotes the negative side of the same command, “Whoever reviles [curses] father or mother must surely die.”

I can’t prove this but my guess is that the Pharisees and scribes are nodding in agreement to this truth until Jesus exposes their hypocrisy in Mark 7:11-13 with the phrase: “But you say...” This is what God says, but you guys say this. They were like those who say: “I know what the Bible says, but God just wants me to be happy.” Actually, if you ever hear yourself use the word “but” after referring to the Bible, you should hear alarms going off because whatever you say next is going to be unbiblical and therefore wrong.

What is it that they were saying? Look at Mark 7:11: “If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)...” Mark inserts some parenthesis again to explain a common Jewish custom at that time. The word “Corban” means, “given to God.”

Here’s what’s going on. If someone pronounced something, “Corban,” it became sacred and therefore could not be used to help

care for parents. It was like a deferred gift that was pledged to the Temple but in many cases, it was never given. And since Numbers 30:2 warns against breaking a vow, once someone declared something Corban, they could never change their mind. It was actually a rather convenient and sinister way to look spiritual and yet get out of one of God's clear commands.

If my parent's coffee maker broke and I had a Keurig and a coffee maker I could declare them both Corban and I wouldn't have to help them. I could do the same thing with my savings account and I'd never have to help out financially.

Let's pick up Mark 7:12: "...Then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother." Notice the word "you" again. They not only gave people an out if they didn't want to care for their parents, they went a step further and actually prohibited them for doing "anything" for them.

Speaking of caring for parents, listen to these strong words from 1 Timothy 5:8: "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

And in Mark 7:13, Jesus gives a stinging indictment to these spiritual charlatans: "Thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do." The word "void" was used to annul a contract and meant to cancel or revoke something that was binding. Do you see what they're doing? Their tradition was wiping out the Word of God. And this wasn't the only time this happened because Jesus said, "And many such things you do." There's the word "you" again!

It's easy for us to pile on these legalistic hypocrites but I wonder what this passage might be saying to us as a church or to us as individuals. What kinds of things does Edgewood do out of tradition that might be more important than what Scripture says? What is that you hold to that you've elevated above the Word of God?

Legalism can be defined as a strict adherence to the law. Specifically, as it relates to faith, a legalist is one who believes that performance is the way to gain favor with God. Legalism is the human attempt to gain salvation or prove our spirituality by outward conformity to a list of religious "do's" and "don'ts." It's often disguised in spiritual beliefs and behavior.

Here are some observations about legalism.

You may want tighten your seatbelt because we're about to go through some turbulence.

1. We tend to think others are legalistic, but that we're not.

The fact is that we're all legalistic by nature. We tend to judge others by our own standards of what is acceptable and what isn't. In essence, we think our sins smell better than other people's because we have very little tolerance for people who sin differently than we do.

2. Legalism is highly contagious.

While it's usually less conscious and systematized in our minds than it was among the Pharisees and the scribes, legalism can spread like a bad virus through an entire congregation. That's why Jesus reserved some of his harshest criticism for legalistic list-makers.

3. Legalism can take a vibrant faith and make it dull and lifeless.

It can evaporate enthusiasm, jettison joy, and stifle spirituality. Instead of finding freedom through Christ, many believers become burdened by a bunch of rules and regulations.

4. Legalism produces large quantities of self-righteousness, judgment and condemnation.

It majors in guilt and misguided sacrifice, urging its followers to evaluate their relationship with God on the basis of standards and scores – and expects others to do the same. Superficial spirituality short-circuits the work of grace.

5. Legalism makes us narrow and divisive.

The legalist insists that everyone live up to the standard they have adopted. In other words, everyone needs to be like me. When we think this way, we miss the delight of diversity in the church.

6. Legalism makes it impossible for people to see Jesus.

There is nothing that pushes someone away faster than a list of rules and regulations when we inadvertently portray Jesus as a drill sergeant instead of the Savior.

Most of us fall into legalism without trying to do so. Let me illustrate.

Several years ago I asked a woman from China and a man from Puerto Rico to lead us in prayer for the persecuted church (By the way, we'll hear from the Puerto Rico Go Team next weekend). It was beautiful to hear Hector pray for the persecuted in Spanish. When Stella prayed in Mandarin, she told us she was going to kneel and very graciously invited us to do the same, if we wanted to. I followed her lead and knelt. My motives were good initially as we interceded for the needs of beleaguered believers around the world. But then I took a peek and noticed only a small number were on their knees. A seed of judgmentalism began to germinate, as I secretly wondered why others weren't as spiritual as I was.

Now, work with me on this. Imagine that because I found kneeling to be so helpful, I began kneeling during my quiet times. When I led in prayer in services I knelt as well. And then I started telling everyone else they had to kneel when they prayed. I might even quote some Scripture. And when I didn't see people kneeling I started to feel angry but also spiritually smug because at least I was doing what everyone else should be doing.

Do you see how subtle and sneaky legalism is? Its weeds are under the surface in each of our lives. Kneeling to pray is a good thing but it can easily become the standard by which we judge other people's spirituality. In short, if we're not careful we'll default to a performance-based, hypocritical kind of faith. By the way, there are other acceptable prayer postures in the Bible – sitting, standing, lying down, bowing, hands in the air or praying to stay awake during sermons.

One of the best ways to not slide into spiritual superficiality and ritualistic religion is by serving those in need. James 1:27 says: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Isaiah 1 says something very similar: "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings...they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them...cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fa

Mark 7:14-23

Where Bad Stuff Comes From

Haddon Robinson, who arguably has written the best book on preaching called, *Biblical Preaching*, once told a group of young preachers, "When you stand up to preach, people are bored...and they expect you to make it worse."

I don't ever want to bore people when I'm preaching but I'm sure I've delivered more than a few snoozer sermons. That reminds me of some bulletin bloopers I've collected over the years. Thankfully these didn't appear in our bulletins but as far as I know they are real announcements.

- The Rev. Merriwether spoke briefly, much to the delight of the congregation.
- Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Nelson's sermons.
- During the absence of our pastor, we enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing a good sermon when J.F. Stubbs supplied our pulpit.

This morning we get the privilege of hearing a great sermon delivered by Jesus himself. When I first studied Mark 7:14-23 I struggled to find the key to unlock it. I did my exegetical work and tried outlining it to no avail. I read about 25 commentaries and listened to several sermons on this section of Scripture and I still couldn't figure it out. I then decided to wake up real early on Thursday morning so I could meditate and marinate on the verses. I kept poring over the passage until finally it clicked that this is a brief sermon preached by Jesus.

I wrote down 8 elements that Jesus included in His sermon. If you get bored, it will be your own fault and you'll have to take it up with Him.

1. Jesus uses an attention-getting introduction.

As we learned last week, Jesus condemned and corrected the religious leaders for focusing on outward hypocrisy instead of inward holiness. The religious leaders were adamant about having clean hands; Jesus was all about having a clean heart.

Look at Mark 7:14: "And He called the people to Him again and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand.'" The crowds may have stepped back a bit when Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders so now Jesus bids them to come closer because He has something to say to them. The word for "hear" means to "listen or hearken" and "understand" has the idea of comprehending. Both words are in the imperative tense, meaning they are commands. Actually, they're the only commands in the passage. In short, they were to listen and learn because what He is about to say is extremely important. I'm reminded of Psalm 49:1: "Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world."

What Jesus is about to say is going to blow their gaskets and crush their categories. This is a monumental moment and He doesn't want them to miss it. Bible Commentator William Barclay suggests that this is "the most revolutionary passage in the entire New Testament."

2. He states a provocative proposition.

The sermon proposition is the summary of the sermon in one sentence. It's the theme, the big idea, or the main point. The preaching proposition last weekend from Mark 7 was this: The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

Jesus is about to say something shocking to people who have been taught their whole lives about the importance of keeping the outside looking good. Many today believe something similar. His preaching proposition is so radical that He's going to repeat it several times. Check out Mk 7:15: "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." The word "defile" is used twice in this verse and is used three more times in the passage. It refers to corruption, pollution and being "unclean."

This statement actually answers the question from the religious leaders back in Mark 7:5. Nothing external can contaminate because the contamination is already on the inside. The word "nothing" means that there is not even one thing. The word "can" refers to "being able" and is in the passive voice, meaning that nothing done to you or outside of you can defile you. Notice that the word "things" is plural, meaning that there are multiple gross things that come gushing out.

This is radical because the religious thinking at that time was that if you could just stay far enough away from all defiling agents, you'd be good before God. They had concluded that sin came about from external stuff like things you eat, touch and wear. Jesus blows this up by showing that we're spiritually defiled because we are sinfully depraved.

My fundamental problem is not my environment or education or my upbringing. My problem is sin and it resides in my heart. The heart of my problem is the problem of my heart. That's why outward things like education, politics, self-help programs, social reform and even religious practices are powerless to change the human heart.

3. He makes a personal appeal.

As Jesus often does, He now drives this radical teaching into the hearts of the people. In verse 17, we see that Jesus moves from the crowd to the core: "And when He had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked him about the parable." The disciples want to discuss this some more because they have never heard anything like this before.

Don't miss that Jesus loved to gather in a "house" to drive His message into the lives of His followers. That's one of the reasons we're so committed to Growth Groups here at EBC. We believe life change happens best in a group setting. We have growth groups that meet Sunday mornings and others that meet during the week. It's where your questions can get addressed and where accountability and encouragement take place. If you're not in a group, I urge you to plug in this fall.

In Matthew 15:15, we see that it's Peter who once again speaks up for the group. The Savior responds to this question by asking them a question in verse 18. In short, He wants to know why the disciples are so dull: "Then are you also without understanding?" The religious leaders don't get it and the crowd is confused but shouldn't His core group comprehend what He's saying? Notice the use of the word "you" as He personalizes his preaching.

Biblical preaching must always be personal. As a preacher I aim to first apply God's Word to my life before I can pass it along to others. I try to keep Ezra 7:10 in mind: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." I must first learn it and then live it before I can lead others to apply it.

One of my favorite responses after a sermon is to have someone come up and say, “God used that sermon to speak to me” or, “I felt like you were in my home this week and that you preached that just for me.” I love how God customizes and personalizes His message for each one of us. I wonder what He has for you...and for me today?

4. He restates the proposition.

After personalizing the preaching, Jesus goes back to the main point of his sermon and restates it from a slightly different angle in the last part of Mark 7:18: “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him.” Because this is such a radical idea, Jesus is pounding the proposition into their minds.

5. He gives an unforgettable analogy.

In order to help them grasp this concept not just intellectually but also at a gut level, Jesus next uses an analogy that they would never forget in verse 19: “Since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” The word for “heart” represents the inner nature of who we are, not our physical heart. Certainly some foods are not the best for heart health and some foods can mess with you like when I ate a gyros sandwich and fries for lunch the same day I ran the Bix at 6 a couple years ago. I’ll spare you the details. Some people have allergies or other health conditions that don’t allow them to eat certain types of food.

But Jesus isn’t talking about this. In this brief anatomy lesson, we’re reminded that when food enters the mouth it goes into the stomach and then comes out the other end. Some of you just woke up! The word for “expelled” is a polite and proper translation. More literally it means, “to go down into the latrine.”

After reporting what Jesus said here, Mark gives us an editorial comment that would have unsettled those from a Jewish background who were all up into what foods were considered “clean” and which were “unclean.” We see this within the parenthesis at the end of verse 19: “(Thus He declared all foods clean.)” To a people that were all about following detailed dietary laws, this was extremely radical.

Jesus wasn’t wiping out the laws from the Old Testament but rather He was fulfilling them as stated clearly in Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Because He fulfilled them, we no longer need to follow them.

This radical repurposing of the dietary laws took a long time for people to accept because they were so used to avoiding anything “unclean.” Peter himself really wrestled with this, so much so that God gave him a vision of a bed sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals who were “unclean” in it. Peter was hungry and so God told him to “kill and eat” in Acts 10:13. Peter pushes back by saying he has never eaten anything unclean. A voice from heaven then says, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, which shows how reluctant Peter was.

Incidentally, there are some groups like Seventh Day Adventists that believe the Old Testament dietary dictums must still be followed. This is addressed in 1 Timothy 4:3-4 where we’re told that in the later days some will: “require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”

These Old Testament dietary laws accomplished their function and have now been fulfilled in Christ. Thus, there there is no need to avoid pork chops or lobster or gyros (except when you’re running in a race).

6. Jesus repeats the proposition.

This is now the third time the Master Teacher repeated the main point of the passage. Look at verse 20: “And He said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him.’” He’s pivoting from the analogy to show that food that goes into a body is not what makes the person unclean but what is expelled from the body as part of the digestive system is extremely unclean and even repulsive. Food is not dirty but what is expelled is dirty.

Now that He has their total attention because some of them are getting grossed out, Jesus now lists some specific examples in verses 21-22 to show that everything starts in our hearts: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts...” Evil is not just “out there” somewhere, its “in here.” The cesspool of sin is in the human heart and evil thoughts literally “gush out” of our insides.

In the original the phrase, “evil thoughts” precedes the verb so it’s the main idea. Everything else flows from this. It’s the root and what follows is the fruit. Proverbs 23:7: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

So, here’s a question. Do our problems originate outside of us, or within us? To frame it theologically, are humans basically good or basically evil? Let’s do a little survey. How many of you think people are generally good? How many of you would say that people are inherently evil?

I started keeping track of different news headlines from just this week and then I stopped because it was way too depressing – an 18-year-old from Germany murdered 9 and especially targeted children, a stabbing in Japan killed 19, there was an attack in Somalia and a Catholic priest had his throat slit by ISIS during a mass in France and another policeman was murdered.

Where does all this come from? The comic strip character Pogo once said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” G.K. Chesterton was once asked to answer this question in a newspaper article: “What’s wrong with the world?” Here’s the answer he submitted: “Dear Sirs, I am.”

Bible commentator J.C. Ryle put it like this: “We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.”

If you think that humans are basically good, ponder these two verses.

- Genesis 6:5: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
- James 4:1: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”

I’ve been thinking about this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson all week:

Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

What begins in our minds comes out in our attitudes and actions. Decadent desires are often fleshed out in dark deeds.

7. He lists specific examples.

Jesus then spells out a dozen sins in verses 22-23 that have their beginnings on the inside and make their way to the outside. This list is extensive, but not exhaustive. Interestingly, the first six are in the plural tense. I’ll list each one and give a brief explanation.

- Sexual immorality. This is the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get pornography and refers to sexual sins in general, including premarital sex and homosexuality.
- Theft. This is the word *klepto* from which we get stealing.
- Murder. This literally means, to slaughter and refers to the taking of innocent life, which includes abortion. Jesus equates anger with murder in Matthew 5:22.
- Adultery. Refers to sex outside of marriage. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:28 that we commit adultery if we look at someone lustfully.
- Coveting. This literally means, “to desire numerically more” and is the root of many other sins. It’s often caused by greed and self-centeredness and refers to an insatiable craving for that which belongs to someone else.
- Wickedness. This is similar to malice and refers to deliberate meanness.
- Deceit. This word was used of trapping an animal through deception.
- Sensuality. This involves having no moral restraint and includes sexual abuse of any kind.
- Envy. This literally means to gaze with an evil eye and refers to jealousy.
- Slander. Any kind of defaming speech.
- Pride. The boastful exalting of oneself or literally, “to show oneself above.”
- Foolishness. Those who have become morally and spiritual desensitized.

8. Jesus ends with a convicting conclusion.

After exposing their hearts, no doubt the disciples are feeling pretty down. Jesus doesn’t move too quickly to bring relief because He wants to give them a convicting conclusion in verse 23: “All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Our problems are not the result of surrounding influences but of internal evil that is already in our hearts. Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Every one is capable of every sin on the list the Lord just laid out. There is no heart where sin does not lurk. Romans 3:10-12, 23: “None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become

worthless; no one does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

What do we do with all this? Isn't this a bummer way to end a sermon? It depends on how you look at it. If you're into just trying to clean yourself up, you'll be pretty discouraged. But if you have no doubt about the depravity in your heart, you'll be ready for a new heart. Listen. The gospel will only be good news to you to the extent you are convinced about the bad news of the depravity of your heart. The good news is only good news in the context of really bad news.

I close today with two challenges. You need a new heart and you need some new habits.

- **You need a new heart.**

Trying to keep external rules won't work. Doing good works is not good enough. You and I need brand new hearts because we stand guilty and condemned before a holy God. Ezekiel 36:25-27:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

When confronted with his sinfulness and the horrors of his unholy heart, David prayed this in Psalm 51:9-10:

“Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Fellow sinner, your heart needs the help of heaven. Cry out to Jesus right now and ask Him for a new heart. Tell him that you want to be born again.

- **You need some new habits.**

Once you have a new heart, you need to cultivate some new habits. Specifically, you and I must put good things in our hearts if we want to change.

1 Peter 2:2: “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

In John 17:17 Jesus prays this for us: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Listen. In order for things to change, you must put good things in your heart. Specifically, it's the Word of God that changes us, from the inside out. I remember after I had been saved for a couple weeks I got really down about how much I was swearing and cussing. I tried willpower but that didn't work. Finally, one of my friends reframed it for me and asked how long I had been using bad language. I told him that it was years. He told me it would take time. The other thing he told me is that once I cultivated new heart habits, that I would eventually stop swearing. He was right.

In Matthew 23:25-26 Jesus reminds us that change works from the inside out: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.”

Most of us need some help growing, don't we? We need resources to equip us and tools that will help clean us up.

As you wrestle with your limited financial resources, wouldn't it be helpful have Dave Ramsey right in your living room to give you God's game plan for money?

After hearing about the persecuted church, wouldn't it be amazing to be able to watch the “I am N” videos from Voice of the Martyrs on your phone with a friend?

When struggling with doubt and wondering if there's any solid evidence for the Christian faith, wouldn't it be incredible to pull up Ravi Zacharias on your tablet?

When your kids are clamoring to watch TV, wouldn't it be nice to have a full video library of solid content like Veggie Tales, Adventures in Odyssey and Chuck Swindoll's series for children called, “Paws and Tales?”

If you're married and going through a rough spot, wouldn't it be beneficial to watch material by Francis Chan, Dennis Rainey, Gary Smalley and Chip Ingram?

If your Growth Group wants to dig deeper into the text of Scripture, wouldn't it be valuable to instantly access, anytime and anywhere, Bible studies from Tony Evans, Matt Chandler, Max Lucado, J.D. Grear, and Kay Arthur?

When discipling a younger person, wouldn't it be encouraging to watch videos with him or her by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, Louie Giglio and Andy Stanley?

Edgewood has some very exciting news – we have a FREE gift for you!

The leadership of EBC is committed to doing whatever it takes to equip you to grow. Our vision of helping people to Gather, Grow, Give and Go are not just words up on banners. The most important way to grow is by reading, studying and applying the Bible...and sometimes we need some assistance and greater understanding to help us grow and to develop some new habits.

Right Now Media is like a Christian Netflix or Amazon Prime, only there is no cost to you!

This online media library has over 10,000 Christian Bible study, training and leadership videos from respected teachers and leaders including resources from over 150 leading Christian publishers and ministries. Topics include marriage, spiritual growth, expository Bible studies, apologetics, studies for students and singles, finance, parenting, mission, leadership training, men's and women's studies, theology, and a full library for kids and families.

Check out this brief video that will explain more details. → [Play Video](#)

We're thrilled to offer this free online streaming resource to everyone affiliated with EBC! It's exciting to leverage technology for the glory of God and for our growth as Christ-followers so we can establish some holy habits that will equip and unleash us to live on mission.

Right Now Media allows you to grow in your relationship with Christ, and with others, at anytime, anywhere, on any connected device – through an app on your phone, a tablet, computer, or through a streaming device like Roku or Apple TV.

The early disciples went everywhere preaching the good news and this tool will help us GO with the gospel to our friends, family members and neighbors. You could even stream a video for a study group at your workplace during lunch.

And did I mention that this gigantic video library is totally free? This is no gimmick. It's our gift to you in order to help you grow. You don't need to be an EBC member. If you're a first-time guest, you can also get it free of charge. We're sending information to all of our missionaries as well.

Let me also say that this is not a replacement for gathering with God's people in our weekend services but is rather a resource for growing and going with the gospel throughout the week!

Here's how you can access it.

- You should receive an email Sunday morning with a link to click that will take you to a landing page where you can register for free.
- If you don't receive an email, it means we don't have it, or we don't have your new one, or it's in your spam filter.
- We have some "Quick Start" cards in the lobby that walk you through the process.
- You can also go to edgewoodbaptist.net and click on the Right Now Media link in the rotating banner, which will take you to an easy-to-use landing page
- We'll also post a link on the Edgewood Facebook page.

Jesus preached quite a sermon, didn't He? I sure hope you weren't bored by it. The real challenge now is what are we going to do with what we now know?

When you're feeling like a failure because of your sinful heart and your sinful habits, make sure to ask for a new heart and begin practicing new habits.

I've been thinking about a song this week that goes along with what we've learned together.

Close your eyes while I read these words.

What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus;

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Mark 7:31-37

Open Ears and Unleashed Tongues

Sermon Part 1

Thanks for gathering with us this weekend as we worship through music and dive into the Word through the message. There are sure a lot of activities and events going on right now like the Rio Olympics. In the QCA we have the John Deere Classic in Silvis and the Men's Fastball World Tournament in Moline. On top of that, did you know that the Nina and Pinta are now docked in Davenport!

Speaking of historical celebrations, at least ten Edgewood couples are marking 50 years of marriage this year. Here's a picture that appeared in the Dispatch/Argus last Saturday of the couples that were married right here at Edgewood five decades ago. Let's give them a shout out because in an age of starter marriages and unholy hookups, these couples are keeping their vows to remain married for better or for worse – Paul and Janet Janecek, Dave and Diane Carnithan, Bob and Betty Daggett, Don and Delma Rose, Jim and Sharon Rice, and Larry and Pat McClean. Other EBC couples celebrating 50 years include: Glenn and Cindy Granger, Dave and Carol Guss, Bill and Myrna Orris and Jim and Mary Kay Sims. If you've been married 50 years or longer, could you stand?

With all that is going on, you could be gone this weekend, but you've chosen to gather with God's people. Way to go!

The order of our service is going to be unusual, as the sermon will be divided into two parts. We'll begin with a first person narrative and then we'll move to a time of praising followed by some more preaching and practical application.

In order to fully engage in God's Word, turn to Mark 7:31-37 and follow along. The passage is found on page 1072 in the pew Bible.

Go back in your minds not 50 years ago or even to 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but all the way back to the year A.D. 32 and listen to this narrative from the perspective of a formerly deaf man who struggled to speak...

I wasn't born deaf but lost my hearing when I was a toddler. I could speak a little bit but apparently I was hard to understand because people would roll their eyes or laugh when I tried to formulate words. Some became impatient while most ostracized and isolated me because I couldn't hear what was being said.

I was completely cut off from all communication. I felt forgotten and was extremely lonely. People thought I was stupid because I stuttered and stammered. I knew I wasn't but I eventually wondered if they were right. It felt like my tongue was all tied up, like there was a chain holding it down.

Some thought I was demon possessed and others believed that God had judged me for some sin that my parents or I had committed. I was miserable and cut off from the community.

I had a double disability but I did have a few friends who cared about me. One day these guys brought me to Jesus – I didn't know who He was or that He was even in town. I couldn't really understand what they were saying but from their hand motions and facial gestures it appeared that they were urgently asking Jesus to help me. It actually looked like they were begging Him. Unbelievably, Jesus looked at me with love, put His arm around me and gently led me away from the crowds.

Jesus wasn't going to put on a performance for the people and He didn't treat me like I was a problem. For the first time, I felt like a person who mattered. When we were all alone, He did something that changed my life.

With His countenance full of compassion, Jesus took his two index fingers and thrust them into my ears! It's like He was using sign language, but more than that, He touched me at the point of my greatest disability. And then He did something that you might find gross but it meant the world to me – he spit on his fingers and then touched my tongue!

Jesus had my full attention at this point. As I gazed into His face, He looked up to heaven to show me that all glory goes to God the Father. And then, even though I couldn't hear yet, I saw Jesus take a very deep breath and blow air out of his mouth, like one does when sighing or groaning.

His sigh showed deep compassion for my situation because He loves to extend mercy to those in misery. My mind went to Isaiah 53:4: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." It felt like Jesus was saying, "Your sorrows are MY sorrows." I love that Jesus is drawn to those with disabilities and that those who are hurting are drawn to Him.

And then He slowly sounded out a word so I could read His lips (remember, I couldn't hear yet). This is what the Master mouthed to me – "Eph-pha-tha!" Mark translated it for you – it means, "Be opened!" It was a command that literally means, "Be unbarred and completely opened!"

Amazingly, my hearing was completely healed and it was like the chain tying up my tongue was immediately broken. I didn't need any speech therapy and was able to speak plainly and perfectly!

Now that I could hear and holler I wanted to tell everyone what Jesus had done for me! But then Jesus gave a very strange command – He charged us to tell no one!

But we couldn't help ourselves. The more He commanded us to be quiet, the more zealously we all proclaimed what He did. We were utterly astonished and completely confounded. A sense of awe and amazement gripped each of us. Mark did a good job capturing it when He wrote that we were "astonished beyond measure." Incidentally, this was a common response of people when they caught a glimpse of who Jesus is. I understand that many in your culture today are bored with Jesus. I don't get that at all!

People were never passive about Jesus. There's no way to just ignore Him. He either made people angry or astonished or amazed or in awe. People fought against Him or they put their faith in Him.

As for us, we kept repeating this refrain: "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." He is a good God and is working everything together for your good and His glory. You might not catch the significance of the last phrase but it's a reference to Isaiah 35:5-6, which is a precise prophecy written 700 years earlier that tells us what the Messiah would do when He showed up: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."

So let's not be tepid in our praise today! Let's let the lame leap and the mute be filled with music. May He untie our tongues so we can proclaim His praises! Please stand as I pray and then we'll bust out into praise together.

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Hear him, you deaf; his praise, you mute,
your loosened tongues employ;
you blind, behold your savior come,
and leap, you lame, for joy.
O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

Sermon Part 2

Prayer
Holy Spirit, You are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for
To be overcome by Your presence, Lord

We started by focusing on the perspective of the formerly deaf man. Now let's reflect on the response of Jesus. We'll then look at three results and wrap up with three requirements.

Response of Jesus

We can learn a lot from our Lord's response. Here are six truths I see.

1. Jesus makes the unreached a priority.

Look at Mark 7:31: "Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis." This map shows the route Jesus took. Last week we saw that Jesus traveled to Tyre to minister to a mother and to deliver her demonized daughter. Now He heads twenty miles north to Sidon, which is very unusual. I wonder why He did that? We have no record of what He did there. One big thing He is doing is training the twelve so that they see the importance of reaching the unreached, especially those outside of Israel.

He then heads over to the area known as the Decapolis before eventually ending up back in Galilee. He's taking the long way home. It would be like walking from here to Iowa City and then heading up to Cedar Rapids in order to go to Geneseo to get back to the Quad Cities.

It's in the Decapolis where He ministers to a man who was unable to hear or speak clearly. It's significant that Jesus came back to this region because in Mark 5:18 the people from this area begged Him to depart from them. Aren't you glad that Jesus doesn't give up on us? He's giving these people a second chance. I love how many of the people are now excited to see Jesus. How did that happen? It's because of the faithful testimony of the formerly demonized man who was deployed to live on mission with his neighbors.

Look now at Mark 7:32: "And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him." Jesus goes to an out of the way place in order to reach someone who felt out of place because He has a special place in His heart for those who have special needs!

Many of our schools and colleges have already started classes. Some parents are sad about this and others are filled with joy. I saw some pictures this week that made me laugh. Here's one...

I'd like all of our teachers (including homeschool teachers), those who work in administration, coaches and custodians to stand. I also want to give a shout out to all students in homeschool, elementary, junior high, high school and college. Could you also stand? You are commissioned to live on mission on your campus! Just as Jesus made the unreached a priority, so too, you are unleashed to reach the unreached. May God use you this year to give special attention to those with special needs.

It's not easy to target the unreached. It often means going long distances and sacrificing comfort. I want to invite our newest Go Team couple up front right now...

2. Jesus ministers in private.

Jesus makes the unreached a priority and He also ministers in private so there would be no distractions. Notice the first part of Mark 7:33: "And taking him aside from the crowd privately..." This would help the man be less self-conscious and was a way that Jesus demonstrated the dignity of the disabled.

In Mark 8:23 Jesus did something similar for another man with a disability: "And He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village..." When the hypocritical religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, Jesus waited until each of them left before talking to her in private. One of my favorite verses is found in Matthew 12:20, which is a quote from Isaiah 42: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out."

Are you allowing Jesus to minister to you in private? While it's essential to gather in a large group and to also plug into a Growth Group, it's critical to have private time with Jesus every day in His Word and in prayer.

3. Jesus touches personally.

Jesus ministered privately to this man and He also personally touched Him as we see in the second half of Mark 7:33: "...He put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue." This was an early form of simple sign language.

4. Jesus reframes perspective.

The next thing we see from Jesus is found in the front part of Mark 7:34: "And looking up to heaven..." He wanted this man to know where the source of power and healing comes from. Instead of just focusing on his issues, Jesus wanted Him to put his attention on the Almighty. Psalm 123:1: "To you, I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!"

Jesus is demonstrating prayerful dependence as He did many times in the gospels. When He took the five loaves and two fish, Mark 6:41 says, "He looked up to heaven and said a blessing..." Before raising Lazarus from the dead, John 11:41 records: "And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.'" And in John 17:1 Jesus begins His prayer this way: "He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.'"

When people spend time with you, does their perspective change because they see you looking up? Are you pointing people to God or to the garbage around them?

5. Jesus shows pain.

Jesus is not distant from our discouragement but comes close with His compassion. We see this in the phrase found in the middle of Mark 7:34: "He sighed..." The Greek word here was used of the snorting of a horse, which helps us see that Jesus was really broken up by this man's misery.

Aren't you glad that we have a Savior who sympathizes with our sorrows? Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

One day a boy came home from school looking really sad. His mom asked him what was wrong and her son said his friend Billy's dad had died. He told his mom that Billy was so upset that he cried and cried all day. The mother asked her son what he did when he saw his friend crying. He replied, "I just laid my head on my desk and cried with him." He was living out Romans 12:15: "Weep with those who weep."

Oh, that we would have tender hearts and tears in our eyes when we're with people in pain! Before moving on, let me point out that compassion comes out of communion with the Father. If your heart is hard, spend time with God in prayer. One prayer that I often pray is this: "God, break my heart for what breaks your heart."

6. Jesus speaks a word of proclamation. When the Savior speaks, amazing things happen. Check out the last part of verse 34: "and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.'" All God had to do was say the word and the world came into being. I love what the Centurion said in Matthew 8:8: "But only say the word and my servant will be healed." Psalm 33:9: "For He spoke, and it came to be."

As we ponder these six points, we see Jesus in action [demonstrate], engaging His feet as He walks to the unreached man with special needs, He uses His arm to take the man aside, He places His fingers in the ears, He spits and then He touches the man's tongue, His head and eyes look up, His breathing becomes pronounced as He sighs and then He uses His mouth to speak a word of release and freedom.

Since we're called to follow in the steps of Jesus, let's do the same by...

- Making the unreached with special needs a priority
- Ministering privately to people
- Touching the hurting personally
- Giving people God's perspective
- Showing pain when we hear of problems
- Speaking a word of gospel proclamation

3 Results

There are then three results that flow from the response of Jesus.

1. Immediate healing. Look at verse 35: "And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly."

2. Zealous proclamation. Strangely, Jesus wants them to keep quiet about what happened in verse 36: "And Jesus charged them

to tell no one. But the more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.” Good news is hard to keep quiet, isn’t it? It’s interesting that they are told to tell no one and they tell everyone; we are told to tell everyone and we seldom tell anyone.

3. Overwhelming astonishment. This passage ends on a note of praise with a reference to fulfilled prophecy in verse 37: “And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’” The tense of this verse shows us that they were in a continuous state of being awestruck.

3 Requirements

What do we do with all this? I wrote down three requirements.

1. Bring those with a disability or disorder to Jesus.

I experienced a temporary disability a week ago Monday when I was using an electric hedge trimmer up on a ladder while standing on the step above the step that says don’t step any higher on the ladder. As I balanced precariously I made a swipe with my right hand right into the pinky on my left hand. If the Olympic judges were scoring it would be hedge trimmer – 1 and pinky – 0. I ended up in the ER with 5 stitches and quite a bit of sympathy because it looked pretty gross.

My pinky has almost healed but some of you are living with a condition for which there is no healing. Some of you parents and grandparents have a child or grandchild with special needs.

I learned this week that nearly 1 in 5 Americans live with some kind of disability. About 10% of our population has a severe disability. I’m ashamed to say I didn’t know this and I haven’t been thinking enough about how Edgewood can do a better job of helping those with some kind of handicap. I ask your forgiveness for that. We are adding some additional handicapped parking spots on the east side of the building. Just a reminder to leave some space in the front of these spaces so people can walk to the building.

In order to understand more about what its like for someone who is deaf, I contacted several people this past week. I spoke with my brother-in-law who has a twin brother who is deaf and I also contacted my niece who is studying audiology.

I also contacted EBC Member Jennifer Gerischer, who is an Interpreter. Here’s some of what she shared with me: “Hearing people (non-signers) think that Deaf people are stupid and can’t do things for themselves. Deaf people can do EVERYTHING a hearing person can do except hear.” The person who trained Jennifer is deaf and added this, “its very painful being isolated from society or a place of worship...you feel unworthy and you long to be a part of the group...that’s why Deaf people hang out with each other... [Jennifer shared the Scripture passage with her and I love her response] I have never thought Jesus would use some form of gesture to get his message across to the deaf man.”

Justin Brooks is deaf and attended EBC before moving out of state with his wife Belynda. Here are some things he wrote down: “Being deaf is like having an invisible disability. From the outside, everything looks normal...Most people don’t know that when they talk to me, I’m trying to read their lips, predict what they are going to say and generally miss roughly 50% or more of what is being said. Loud noisy places mean I’m missing more. So in large gatherings of people, I tend to feel my loneliest [it’s pretty cool that Jesus met with the deaf man away from the crowd].

“It would be nice if people didn’t get mad when I can’t understand them and ask them to repeat themselves...I’m working feverishly at trying to decode what they are saying while trying to not sound like a fool...My mind is trying to construct your sentence from the bits of speech I heard and the movement of your lips. I also probably have zero context to try and build this sentence from.

“Just because I’m deaf does not mean I know sign language. I feel trapped in the middle between the hearing and the non-hearing. Thankfully things are starting to come around for people in this middle ground as our ranks will be soon filling with the baby boomers and the millennials who wear ear buds 24/7. More resources are becoming available to us. I hope as technology advances, voice to text becomes more reliable and widely used.

“I wish people would take a moment to look at me when they speak, enunciate and say what they need to in a normal calm tone of voice. When its rushed, garbled, yelled, or you’re looking the other way, the conversation is going to be a rough one for both of us... When I answer your question with some off the wall response, don’t get angry and think I’m messing with you. I’m trying hard and I’m sorry that I’m not perfect. If you say something and I don’t respond, don’t assume I’m ignoring you. I probably have no idea that you are trying to address me.

"I cringe when I hear people say if they had to be disabled, they'd pick being deaf. They don't realize that being deaf is invisible isolation. It's not fun, it's very tough, it becomes a huge part of who you are, it invariably dictates almost every moment in life.

"Of all the disabilities out there, if I had to choose one to be, being deaf is not the one I'd choose. I'd choose the disability of being a Packers Fan."

Here's a verse for those of us who can hear and see: Leviticus 19:14: "You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD."

Team, we must become more aware of what it's like for those with disabilities, disorders and special needs. And we must reach out and embrace them as Jesus says in Luke 14:13-14: "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." I'll be bringing one of our neighbors over to our Block Party this afternoon in her wheelchair. I also pick up her newspaper and hand it to her every morning.

If you want to grow in your understanding of those with a disability, I highly recommend that you use your free RightNow Media account and watch some teaching by Joni Eareckson Tada, who is a quadriplegic. I was also greatly helped by a seminar called, "10 Special Needs of Special Needs Parents." Go to edgewoodbaptist.net to get your free account and just type "disability" in the search bar. I printed some copies and put them on the Resource Table.

2. Surrender to God's sovereignty.

Are you struggling right now to say, "He has done all things well?" Sometimes God doesn't heal. In fact, Exodus 4:11 says: "Then the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?'"

I had a conversation with someone recently about a difficult situation he is facing regarding a family member's disorder. I was sympathetic as I practiced my "sighing" and asked him how he was doing with everything. While I can't quote his answer, here's a summary of what he said: "We are seeking the glory of God and trusting that in His sweet sovereignty He will use our situation for His purposes." All I could do was nod my head as tears filled my eyes. This young man is living out his theology and has fully surrendered to the sovereignty of God.

Have you done the same? Can you say, "He has done all things well" even it's not working out the way you would like?

3. Ask God to give you spiritual ears so you can be saved.

I can't imagine how difficult a physical disability must be. But some of you have a spiritual disability. If you are not yet saved, your sins have separated you from God. You've been cut off from communication because you are spiritually deaf and blind. But Jesus is a compassionate Savior who is close to you right now. Reach out to Him and ask Him to save you so your eyes and ears can be opened and your tongue can confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

I came across an ancient baptism prayer that is still used in some churches. It's called the Ephphatha (be opened) prayer. As the pastor touches the ears and then the mouth of the one being baptized, he prays, "The Lord has made the deaf hear and the mute speak. May He touch your ears to receive His word, and your mouth to proclaim Him, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen."

Another big event took place this weekend called the Tug Fest. The main attraction is a tug of war across the Mississippi between those who live in LeClaire, Iowa and those from Port Byron, Illinois.

Are you in a tug of war with God today? If so, you're not going to win so you might as well take your hand off the rope. Are you ready to do that?

Closing Song: Come You Sinners

Mark 8:1-10

Finding Satisfaction for Your Soul

How many of you like watching reruns? Most of us don't like reruns when they appear in the middle of the NCIS season but they're

OK when we choose to catch an old show like Everybody Loves Raymond or when binging on a Law and Order marathon, right?

We love the new and novel but we also go back to the tried and true. I read an article this week published in the Scientific American from November 2012 entitled, “Why You Like to Watch the Same Thing Over and Over and Over Again.” The subtitle serves as the summary of the article: “Reruns spark contemplation about personal growth.” Researchers have developed a new word called “reconsumption” and have concluded that we use familiar entertainment to measure how our lives have changed in positive ways: “People gained insight into themselves and their own growth by going back for a do-over, subconsciously using the rerun...as a measuring stick for how their own lives had changed.”

Our passage today feels a bit like a rerun. Let’s lock in to see if the lives of the disciples, and our lives, have changed since the first time we heard a similar story from Mark 6:30-44. Our episode is found in Mark 8:1-10. Please stand as I read: In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, 2 “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.” 4 And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” 5 And he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.” 6 And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. 7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

While this incident appears to be a replay or retelling of Jesus multiplying a meal, it’s actually a completely different event. This is important to know because critics point to these passages as evidence of a contradiction in the Bible – some believe there was just one event and the gospel writers got the details wrong. But that’s not the case at all. Let’s start with some similarities:

- Both miracles involved huge crowds who were hungry
- Jesus used a small amount of bread and fish to feed a lot of people
- The disciples doubted the Lord’s ability to provide but were also involved in distributing the food
- In both miracles, Jesus took the little they had, gave thanks, and multiplied it
- The crowds ate and were completely satisfied and a large amount of food was left over

But there are also some key differences:

- The first miracle involved feeding 5,000 compared to 4,000 here
- The amount of bread is different – 5 loaves versus 7 loaves
- The leftovers from the first miracle go in 12 small baskets and in the second, 7 large baskets are used
- The first meal came after a day of teaching and this one follows three days of teaching
- The first miracle took place among Jewish people and this one happens in the Decapolis, a Gentile community

Jesus Himself tells us that there were two separate incidents in Mark 8:19-20. When critics raise this as a contradiction take them to these words of Christ: “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?’ And they said to him, ‘Seven.’”

BTW, if you want to become better equipped to defend your faith, and answer questions raised by skeptics, I highly recommend over 25 free resources that are available on RightNow Media by Ravi Zacharias. You can sign up for this resource by simply going to our website.

The disciples no doubt saw both the similarities and the differences between the two multiplied meals. As the Master Teacher and Trainer, Jesus wanted to “spark contemplation about spiritual growth.” And this was their chance for a do-over. Likewise, Jesus desires to reinforce some truths in our lives as well. He does this through repetition. This is a good word for us because many times we want to hear something new but God wants us to live out what we already know to be true. Here then are six reminders from this passage that will spark our spiritual growth.

1. We’re called to cultivate the compassion of Christ.

Mark 8:1 begins with the phrase, “In those days...” This is referring to the 6-8 month period of time where Jesus is teaching the disciples the importance of taking the gospel to the unreached. As we learned last week, that also includes those with special needs. Here’s a summary of the sermon: “Jesus goes to an out of the way place in order to reach someone who felt out of place because

He has a special place in His heart for those who have special needs!" I wanted to mention that we have some assistive hearing devices for those who are hearing impaired at the tech booth. I also realized that I missed a whole category of those with special needs – those who are struggling with mental illness. I also wanted to make you aware that we added additional handicapped parking this week.

Last Saturday night EBC member Shawn Moreno came up to me after the service and thanked Edgewood for addressing special needs. He had polio when he was young and told me that for many years he believed that God made junk and that he was junk. And then someone shared Psalm 139:14 with him and it totally changed his life. Shawn then left to go home and as I was getting ready to leave the building, he showed up at the doors and handed me this plaque that a friend made for him. It reads, "God Doesn't Make Junk." And here's what it says on the back: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Let's go back to Mark 8:1. These followers of Jesus were living out our first "G" because it says, "...when a great crowd had gathered." Jesus recognizes that "they had nothing to eat" so "he called his disciples to him and said to them." Jesus saw a need and he wanted his disciples to see their responsibility to help meet the need.

In Mark 8:2, Jesus says, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat." This is the only time in Mark's Gospel where Jesus says that He has compassion. There are other passages that say Jesus had compassion but here Jesus declares his deep feelings for the crowd. The word "compassion" means to be moved in the inward parts, to feel deeply in the gut. The idea is that there is a visceral reaction including a rush of blood when faced with something sad. The word from Latin literally means, "to suffer alongside." Jesus is not absent from our agony or distant from our distress. He knows the crowd is hungry and it affects Him inwardly.

They have been listening to a sermon that lasted for three days (and you thought I preached long) and had run out of food. Wanting his disciples to sympathize and empathize, Jesus says: "And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." The word "faint" means, "to collapse."

I love how Jesus knows that many had come a great distance. Some of you drive a long way each week to gather with God's people. Way to go! If you travel more than 30 minutes, can you raise your hand? More than 45? An hour? That reminds me of something my dad once said when I introduced him to someone from our previous church who drove 45 minutes each week. My dad just started shaking his head and said, "Why would you come that far just to listen to him?" Interestingly, the phrase "far away" is used to describe Gentiles in Acts 2:39. Matthew records in 15:32 that Jesus adds, "I am unwilling to send them away hungry..."

Jesus knows that His disciples must first develop great compassion before they will live out the Great Commission. He's trying to shock and startle them to feel the pain of the people who have no food and are far from home. The world has been rocked this week by a picture that has gone viral. It shows a young boy from Syria who was wounded in the ongoing war in his country. This has shocked us and stirred us...and it should. One commentator from the New York Times said in response, "Words have died and our tongues are tied."

In Mark 8:4, it's as if the disciples throw their hands up in the air: "And His disciples answered him, 'How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?'" Their response is almost an exact rerun of what they said before Jesus fed the 5,000.

In contrast to the compassion of Christ, the disciples are looking for a loophole. Jesus wants them to cultivate compassion but they are quick to complain. The crowd had no food and His core group had no faith.

2. A little is a lot in the hands of Jesus.

Not letting them out of their responsibility to help meet the needs of these people, Jesus wants them to know that a little is a lot when it's in His hands. This is a missional moment and He doesn't want them to miss it. Great things can happen if we can just get what we have into His hands! Listen to the question He asks them in verse 5: "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." These loaves looked more like pita bread, only thinner, like a cracker. There was no way this would be enough to feed these people.

Let's pause and ponder something. Do you ever think something like this? The needs are so overwhelming, what good is the little I can do? Let me encourage you to follow this maxim: See a need...meet the need. I began our staff team time this week by asking each team member to think of one person who is in need and then to cultivate compassion for that individual. After a few minutes I asked each one to think of one thing they could do to reach out this week. We did the same thing as a group of deacons Tuesday night. Let's do that exercise right now. Who is God bringing to your mind right now? What can you do to help meet that need? See a need...meet the need.

Listen. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. The key is to first grow in compassion and then to give the little you have so Jesus can do a lot with it. Compassion is when a hurt grows in your heart that makes you want to help the hurting.

- That happens every time you give in the offering plate or online through our website. The size of your gift is not as important as the compassion and commitment that flows from your heart.
- When you see the devastation caused by the flooding in Louisiana, where too many houses to count have been destroyed, a small gift can go a long way. We have posted a Go Fund Me link on our Facebook page if you'd like to help Central Baptist Church in Baton Rouge.
- Others of you are moved in your gut to see people fleeing their homes because of fires in California.
- A number of you are giving to refugees through the ministry of World Relief. Any little bit helps.
- Many of you gave to Youth Hope this summer so campers could have toiletries and other items. Many put their faith in Jesus Christ through these camps.
- The Walk for Life on Saturday, September 17th, is a great way to raise money for the life-affirming ministry of Pregnancy Resources.
- If you're moved by the fact that many children don't have shoes for their feet, we'll be doing a tennis shoe drive next month for kids who live on the west end of Davenport through the ministry of One Eighty. Last year we donated around 100 pairs. Pastor Kyle and I sat next to Rusty Boruff, the director of One Eighty on Thursday at a ministry meeting, and he told us they have purchased 200 bags for the shoes we'll donate – Edgewood's reputation for outrageous generosity must be spreading!

3. Recognize the power of public prayer.

In Mark 8:6 we read: "And He directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks..." In Mark 8:7 we learn: "And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them..." The word for "sit down" actually means, "to recline," which shows that this was a celebratory banquet for hungry people. Notice also that they are on "the ground." This is another difference from the feeding of the 5,000 where they were seated on the grass.

Jesus publicly gave thanks for the bread and publicly blessed the fish. Here's the lesson for us – always give thanks and bless God for what He has given to you. There are actually two prayers here – one of thanksgiving and the other a prayer of praise. We're to thank God for what He's done for us and we're to praise Him for who He is. We thank him for what He's given and we praise Him for being God.

Don't miss the importance of thanking God and praising Him in public.

- When you're at a restaurant, ask your server how you can pray for him or her and then thank God for your food and give Him praise for who He is.
- I had the privilege of praying out loud at our block party last Sunday night before we ate while we all held hands. It was powerful.
- I loved watching some Olympic athletes give thanks and glory to God these past two weeks.
- Consider joining with the group of people who pray here on Tuesday nights.
- We're going to focus more on praying during our Sunday night services this fall (they'll begin again on September 11). We'll praise by singing several hymns, we'll have some brief preaching and then we'll pray for some specific requests related to revival in our church and in our country.
- Edgewood is hosting a national prayer simulcast for women on Friday night, September 19th called, "Cry Out!"

4. Pass along what has been given to you.

The disciples give Jesus the little they have and then Jesus multiplies it and gives it back to them so they can distribute it to others. They were to be the conduit of blessing. We see this in verse 6: "...He broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd." They did the same with the fish according to verse 7: "...He said that these also should be set before them." This is mind blowing – Jesus created sushi that never swam and bread that already had ground grain in it! The tense of the word "gave" is continuous, meaning that Jesus "kept on giving."

I love the picture here. Jesus didn't just stack up some fish and chips on the ground like a big pile of mulch that they could shovel out to people. Not at all. The disciples came to Jesus and received the miracle and then they distributed the food to the people. And then they went back to Jesus for more and then went back to the people. Jesus provided and they dispensed. Their job was to come

with empty hands, get filled up, and then pass the provision to others. Jesus keeps giving as long as the disciples keep giving it away.

This makes me think of the role of parents. We're to keep coming to Jesus so that He fills our empty hearts and hands so that we can then pass along what we're getting to our children.

It's our responsibility to shepherd, guide, discipline, disciple and train our children but we can't do this on our own. We must regularly be going to Jesus and then passing along what we receive from Him to them.

I have really enjoyed watching shots of the parents of athletes at the Olympics. They get nervous, scream and yell. Did you see the parents of gymnast Aly Raisman cheering her on?→ [Play Video Clip](#)

Parents, as we cheer on our children I want to pass along two equipping opportunities available this fall. The first is a seminar we are hosting on Saturday, October 22 that we're calling, "Parenting with Purpose." This is open for all moms and dads of any age. The second is a group for moms called, "Entrusted with a Child's Heart" that will be meeting on Thursday nights beginning in September. Here are some quotes from moms who've been through this training.

Kodi Kargl writes, "After posting on Facebook about a parenting frustration, someone let me know about a class that she felt would help me through situations like that. I enrolled in Entrusted and it changed my life. Not only did it lead to me being saved, but shortly after, my husband Tyler as well...I felt like every page of the book was relevant to my life...I now have a community of other moms who are equipped with answers and helpful advice when I'm in need."

And Stacey Smiley had this to say about Entrusted, "At the very first class, I looked around and felt very out of place being the oldest mother in the room. I had made a decision that I would not be coming back. The following Sunday the sermon was, 'God has you right where you are supposed to be.' My advice to anyone considering this class would be, no matter how young or old you are, how young or old your child is, how little or how much you know, this class will develop or strengthen your walk with God and give you the path to raise a loving, godly child."

5. Only the Savior can give you satisfaction.

Check out the first sentence in verse 8: "And they ate and were satisfied." The word satisfied means, "to be full and fulfilled." Let me lay it out straight for you. If you are seeking satisfaction in a person or a possession or pleasure, in your career or in sports, through a substance or the pursuit of success, you will never find fulfillment. Why? Because only a saving relationship with Jesus Christ will satisfy your soul. Check out Jeremiah 2:13: "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Some of us don't see the satisfaction that only the Savior can provide because frankly we're too full from other things. Luke 1:53: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." Jeremiah 31:25: "For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish."

Speaking of the Olympics and how we celebrate those who win medals, I came across a stunning verse in Ezekiel 7:19: "Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity."

6. God's supply will always exceed your needs.

A week ago, Chanea Drummond made homemade enchiladas for Celebrate Recovery. When I saw her bring them in on Friday afternoon she told me that she was hoping God would multiply the food so there would be enough for everyone to eat as much as they wanted. I didn't tell her but I hoped God would multiply the enchiladas so the staff could have the leftovers for lunch! Well, a miracle took place in the kitchen because we had an entire pan for our team lunch as we celebrated the ministry that God gave to Justin Rumley, our pastoral intern this summer.

After Jesus fed the crowd and they were totally satisfied, verse 8 continues: "And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full." The word here for "basket" is a large basket, like the kind used to lower the apostle Paul over a wall in Acts 9:25. That's a lot of leftovers!

God loves to give and give and give. Ephesians 3:20: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us." And He wants us to live an abundant, not ordinary life as stated in John 10:10: "I

came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Luke 6:38 tells us that when we’re generous, God is generous: “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

Summary

Most of us need reruns and repetition because we seldom get the message the first time. Here’s a replay of where we’ve been today. As I go through this list, which lesson do you most need to apply? I’ll state them in the form of questions.

1. How can you cultivate the compassion of Christ?
2. What little thing can you put in the hands of the Lord?
3. How can you participate in more public prayer?
4. In what ways can you pass along what has been given to you?
5. What do you need to change to find all your satisfaction in the Savior?
6. In what specific situation do you need to trust in God’s unlimited supply?

We’re not going to close with a song today but rather with Scripture. I’m going to put Isaiah 55:1-3 up on the screen and I want you to meditate on it for awhile and then I’m going to use this passage as a paradigm for our closing prayer: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.”

Mark 8:11-21 Beware of Unbelief

Do you pay attention to signs when you see them? It depends, right? I like seeing signs that make me laugh [show funny signs].

It’s easy to ignore signs, especially when they’ve been there for a while. This has happened repeatedly when trucks have traveled down Harrison Street or up Brady Street in Davenport and hit immovable bridges. So far the bridges have won every one of these encounters [check out some pictures of these stuck trucks].

These truck-eating bridges even have their own Facebook page.

One article I found online begins like this: “Scenes of stunned drivers staring at the crushed hulks of their trailers, their cargo littering the roadway, were common over the years until the Iowa Department of Transportation installed a height detection system with electric warning signs on Harrison Street in 2001.”

Even with all the new signs and warning systems, crashes continue to happen. I counted three sets of flashing yellow lights and lots of signs on Harrison Street.

But the bridge still gets hit. Why is that? Because signs are often disregarded. Signs alone don’t help if you don’t pay attention to them.

There was another crash into the bridge on Brady Street on Wednesday.

We’re going to see that the enemies of Jesus wanted some additional signs but they end up slamming into the Savior anyway. The disciples of Jesus want to believe but often ignore the signs as well. In our passage for this weekend we see two groups of people.

The phony Pharisees are settled in their unbelief and the forgetful followers are unsettled in their belief. Let’s look first at those who are settled in their unbelief.

Settled Unbelief

Let’s set the context by going back to Mark 8:10. Jesus has just fed the 4,000 and is ending his 6-8 month journey in which he took the good news to the unreached Gentiles: “And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.”

As He arrives back on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, we read in verse 11 that the religious Gestapo come out of hiding and slam into Him: "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him." The word "came" indicates that they "came out" as if in hiding, marching toward Him with purpose and determination. The word "began" is in the present infinitive, meaning "they began at once and kept it up." Jesus has already given these religious leaders many signs but they don't pay attention to them. All they wanted to do was argue with Him as they sought a way to trap Him.

There were plenty of signs for the Pharisees to see but they had ignored all of them. One of the biggest ones is found in Mark 1:11: "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" Jesus had healed diseases, cast out demons, controlled the deep, made a miraculous dinner twice, healed the deaf, and raised the dead. What other signs did they need?

In response to the demands of the phony Pharisees who are settled in their unbelief, Jesus does two things.

1. He denounces them.

Their attitude affects Jesus emotionally in verse 12: "And He sighed deeply in His spirit..." We saw in 7:34 that Jesus sighed when seeing and sensing the situation the deaf man was in. When face-to-face with the Pharisees He sighed because of the hardness of their hearts. The idea is that He "snorted with anger." This sighing was done "deeply" in His soul, which means that it was emphatic and very strong. This is similar to His reaction in Mark 3:5 where "He looked around at them in anger, grieved at their hardness of heart."

With a hint of exasperation, Jesus then asks them a probing question, "Why does this generation seek a sign?" In Matthew 16:4, Jesus describes this generation as "evil and adulterous." In Mark 9:19, Jesus cries out, "O faithless generation..." As we come back to our passage, Jesus definitively states with an oath, "Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."

2. He departs from them.

Verse 13 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible: "And He left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side." This is an abrupt departure because Jesus knows these men have become settled in their unbelief. They want to fight, not grow in faith. They want to argue, not accept what is true. Jesus no doubt knew Proverbs 23:9: "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words." Proverbs 18:2 says: "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion." Do you know people like that? Jesus is practicing what He taught in Matthew 7:6: "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

This is similar to what we read in Psalm 81:12: "So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels" and Romans 1:24: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." In Hosea 4:17, God knows that one of the tribes is so hardened towards Him that He declares: "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone."

Because these men are so hardened against the Lord, Jesus denounces them and then departs from them. They experience the wrath of God's abandonment as they are turned over to their own deeds of darkness. That sure explains much of what we see in our culture today, doesn't it? I like how one pastor puts it: "No one goes to Hell because God sends them there. People go to Hell because they refuse to turn from their sins and believe on Jesus."

Phony Pharisees can become hardened but so can forgetful followers.

I heard recently about a man who wanted to build a bar next to a church. The congregation strongly opposed it and started praying that it would never open. Just before it was finished, lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The church members rejoiced and gave all the credit to the Lord.

The bar owner then sued the church, claiming that the congregation's prayers had cost him his building, but the church leaders denied having anything to do with it. The case went to court and the judge wasn't sure how to rule because he had a bar owner who believed in the power of prayer and a church congregation that didn't!

The disciples, who were close to Christ, had a hard time believing in Him, even when the signs were very clear.

Unsettled Belief

While the Pharisees were phony and settled in their unbelief, the closest followers of Jesus were forgetful and unsettled in their

belief. Look at verse 14: “Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.” It’s easy to forget things, isn’t it? Having said that, I wonder how they could have forgotten bread when there were seven large baskets of leftovers available from the feeding of the 4,000. They look around the boat and see just one round loaf of bread.

They’re not only forgetful, they also get flustered when they hear what Jesus says in verse 15: “And He cautioned [kept giving orders] them, saying, ‘Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’” Check out the strong words: “Cautioned...watch out...beware of.” These are present imperatives or commands that can be translated like this: “Keep watching out and continue taking heed...always be on your guard against.”

I’ve often wondered how yeast works in dough. Here’s what I learned online: “As soon as flour, water and yeast are stirred together, enzymes in the yeast and the flour cause large starch molecules to break down into simple sugars. The yeast metabolizes these simple sugars and exudes a liquid that releases carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol into existing air bubbles in the dough, causing it to rise.”

I also stopped by two bakeries on Friday so I could find out more about how yeast works. The first baker said he was too busy when he found out I was a pastor. The second one didn’t know I was a pastor until after he came out to talk to me and then got kind of nervous (I have that affect on people). He told me he didn’t have much time so I explained the passage we’re studying and asked him what would happen if he didn’t use any yeast. He just laughed and said the dough would come out like a rock. I then asked him how much he uses and he told me it just takes a few ounces to work its way through an entire 50-pound chunk of dough.

Yeast is a live, single-celled fungus (you’re probably not going to eat bread again). Leaven is alive and under the right conditions will spread rapidly through the dough. In the Bible leaven is often used as a metaphor for the invisible, pervasive spread of sin. Each Passover season, Jewish people would remove all leaven from their house as a way to remind them of the time when God’s people didn’t have time to let their bread rise during the Exodus. Getting rid of leaven also represented their desire to live pure lives.

The idea is that it only takes a small amount of leaven working invisibly as it penetrates through the whole loaf. In Galatians 5:9 we read how false teaching can infiltrate a body of believers: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” In 1 Corinthians 5:6, the Apostle Paul explains how sin can spread though an entire church: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”

In short, the leaven of the Pharisees was bad theology, legalism, and unholy hypocrisy. The leaven of Herod could be stated as an overemphasis on political power, materialism, sexual license, immorality, and worldly focus. This is a good word for us, isn’t it? We’re surrounded by syrupy and sentimental spirituality that spews from broadcasts and books and we’re inundated with the pervasive nature of politics as the ultimate source of satisfaction. Listen. Beware of the leavening nature of both religion and politics.

The disciples are as dense as I am most of the time. Jesus is trying to take them deep and they’re all wrapped up in not having lunch in Mark 8:16: “And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.” The tense of the word “began” indicates that they “kept on talking about it.” I wonder if they were pointing fingers – “Peter, you can walk on water, why couldn’t you bring the leftovers?” “Thomas, you were supposed to bring the bread!” To which he responded, “I doubt it.” (See what I did there?). “Judas, you’re in charge of the shekels. Where’s all the bread? You betrayed us!” (I slipped that one in there, too).

In Mark 8:17, Jesus sets them up for 8 rapid-fire questions as a way to help them, and us, become more settled in our belief in Him as the true Bread of Life: “And Jesus, aware of this, said to them...” This is a teachable moment as He uses the loaf as a visual aid.

As we look at these questions, we see that Jesus is appealing to their heads, their hearts and their hands. This is a good process for us to go through as well when we find our own faith faltering.

1. Remember God’s power in your head.

The first two questions found in Mark 8:17 are designed to stir up their memories: “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?” He wants them to think more deeply about the bread than they have been because they totally misunderstood the message. The word, “understand” means, “to put together.” Two more questions directed to their minds are found in Mark 8:18: “Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?” To remember means, “to call to mind.”

The first place to start when you’re slipping spiritually is to focus on the facts. Bring to mind those things that you know to be true about God. That’s why it’s imperative to read the Bible every day – it helps you remember His words and reflect on His works.

Let me give you an example from Lamentations 3:19-24. Jeremiah is lamenting how difficult things have been as he reflects on the destruction of Jerusalem: “Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.” When his mind is set on suffering and pain, he ends up in a really bad place.

I love what he does in Mark 8:20 as he forces the facts about God to the front of his mind: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope..." His hope is coming back, but not until he disciplines Himself to remember what is true. When He does that, He explodes in exaltation in Mark 8:21-24: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"

When your faith is faltering do you force your mind to focus on what's true?

2. Reflect on God's purposes in your heart.

One of these eight questions is directed to our hearts. It's found in the last part of Mark 8:17: "Are your hearts hardened?" While those who are settled in their unbelief have hardened hearts, it's possible for followers of Jesus to have hearts that have become hardened as well. I'm sure they didn't like hearing this question.

Because our default setting is to disengage and not to engage fully in what Christ calls us to do, our sermon series this Fall will be called, Engage. To engage means, "to occupy, attract or become involved in." And since our habits flow out of our hearts, we're going to reflect on some key biblical and cultural issues in this series. Pastor Mel Brown will kick it all off on September 10-11 with a Prophecy Update. We'll be videoing the Saturday night sermon and showing it on Sunday if his health won't allow so you may want to come that Saturday night to hear him live.

BTW, during our team retreat this past Tuesday we discussed our attendance patterns in our three services. Our 10:45 service is by far the largest and is getting quite full. If you're able to switch your preferred time and come on Saturday night at 5:00 or at 8:00 on Sunday morning we can make sure we have enough room for our guests. Related to this, if you're able to move toward the center of the pews that would help as well. The front rows are always available but I know that will be a hard sell because we're known as "Back Row Baptists."

Here are the other topics we will tackle in our series: Engaging in Prayer, Engaging in Groups, Engaging with the Ordinances, Engaging Glocally (Missions Festival), Engaging with Your Family, Engaging with the Holy Spirit, Engaging with the Reformation, Engaging as Citizens (this is the weekend before the presidential election), Engaging with the Persecuted and Engaging with Thankfulness (to prepare us for Thanksgiving).

Do you ever hear yourself saying something like this: "I used to feel like Jesus was near but I don't feel that way anymore." When we use words like this we know we're living by feelings, not by faith. Friends, our faith is built on fact, not on feelings. Feelings by their very nature will fluctuate.

I still remember a very simple illustration that I came across when I was nineteen years old and brand new in my faith. It's from Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru). They use a train to demonstrate that facts are the engine, faith is connected to facts and the caboose represents our feelings. Fact → Faith → Feelings. Feelings are important but they should never drive your train.

In order to grow in your faith, start by remembering God's power in your head and then reflect on His purposes in your heart so you don't become hardened. Finally, replay the provision God has put in your hands.

3. Replay the provision God put in your hands.

Knowing that our thoughts and feelings can be scattered and untrustworthy, Jesus draws His disciples to replay how He has provided for them in the past. He asks two more questions in Mark 8:19-20 and gets them to actually answer the questions, which is an outstanding teaching method: "'When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' And they said to him, 'Seven.'"

They passed their math test and this exercise helped them replay how God had provided in the past. We must do the same. When we remember His faithfulness in the past, we'll realize He can do the same in the present. That's why Psalm 103:2 says, "Forget not all His benefits."

The final question brings it all together as He makes an appeal to them in verse 21: "And He said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'" These questions are not designed to shame or blame but rather to teach and train. According to the parallel passage of this same event, we learn that they finally do understand according to Matthew 16:12: "Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

So, let's remember God's power in our heads, reflect on His purposes in our hearts, and replay the provision God placed in our hands in the past. When we do, we'll grow in our faith as well.

Seeing the Signs

Jesus has given us plenty of signs. We just need to follow them.

I had a very interesting encounter on Friday morning when I was sitting in a MacDonald's in Moline finishing this sermon. An older man sat in the booth across from me. We both smiled at each other when he sat down. After a few minutes he said, "Mister, I have a big problem. Do you know where a Catholic church is in this town?" I told him I wasn't sure but that I was a pastor. I moved in across from him and listened to his story.

He asked what he should do about some personal problems, so I told him that he first needed to be born again. I explained that Jesus is the bridge between sinners and a holy God and that the only way to be saved is to turn from his sins and ask Jesus into his life. I had just read John 3 that morning so I quoted verse 3 to him: "Unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." I gave him a gospel booklet and urged him to receive Christ and be saved.

I pointed out the signs that God has been giving to him and now I'm praying that my new friend Bob doesn't crash into the bridge but instead crosses over the bridge that Jesus made. I love John 5:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

What about you? Don't ignore the signs any longer. If you do, you're headed for a crash! Submit and surrender to Jesus Christ today and cross over from death to life.

I was struck as I studied this passage that the word "generation" appears twice. I'm so thankful that Edgewood is a multi-generational church, aren't you? We will continue to be faithful to preach the gospel to every generation.

I'm thrilled that God has been bringing members of the millennial generation but we still have a lot of work to do. Millennials include those born between 1980 and 2000. Can you raise your hand if you're part of this generation? How many of you have children born during this 20-year span? All four of our daughters are millennials. How many of you have grandchildren in this generation?

I love millennials for many reasons. Let me list just six:

1. You are looking for a cause and really want to change the world.
2. You want to be mentored by the older generations and value wisdom and insight.
3. You love relationships and teamwork.
4. You know how to seamlessly integrate technology into your lives.
5. You are very pro-life and stand up for the preborn.
6. You are compassionate and caring for people of all races and backgrounds.

But, millennials are the least reached demographic group in history. Almost 2/3 rarely or never attend religious services.

We are not good with this and want to see this change. We long to see a ministry movement among millennials in the QCA, where students and singles live on mission on their campuses, workplaces and neighborhoods for the glory of God and the growth of this church!

That's why we did an extensive nationwide search and ended up calling Pastor Kyle Parks as our new Pastor of Youth and Young Adults! Kyle is joined by his wife and ministry partner, Liesl, along with their two boys – Emory and Sullivan. → Have them come up front. Pastor Kyle and Liesl, leaven is normally used to describe the influence of evil, but Jesus also told a parable about the pervasive influence of the gospel in Matthew 13:33: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." Pastor Kyle you are shepherding three measures of flour, if you will. 1. Junior High 2. High School 3. Singles

We're praying that God will use your influence to influence other influencers so that the gospel message saturates students and singles in the QCA.

Mark 8:22-26 Seeing Clearly

I love hearing how people come to Christ, don't you? Here's the main point of our passage today: The message of the gospel always remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people.

Let's try a little experiment. Can you shout out in one sentence what method God used to save you? I'll start. God used the death of

a friend and then my college roommate to share the gospel with me.

Let me prime the pump with some responses I received to a post I put on Facebook this week. Here's what I wrote: "I'm conducting an informal survey to find out what method God used to bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It would help a lot if you could share in a sentence how you were saved."

- I was taken to church as a baby and around 7 years old I realized my need for Christ and salvation.
- I gained my walk with Christ through Celebrate Recovery at Edgewood.
- My grandfather led my sister and I to the Lord during a Sunday church service where the preaching was on hell.
- God allowed me to get to the lowest place I needed to be so my hard head would have no doubts it was Him that saved me from my mess of a life.
- A youth leader led me when I was 15. Yeah for youth leaders that don't give up!

Who's next? Just raise your hand and I'll call on you. Remember...just give a one-sentence summary of the situation God used to save you.

Did you notice how God uses a variety of ways to reach a variety of people? That means that we shouldn't make the way he opened our eyes normative for everyone else. The message of the gospel remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people.

Charles Spurgeon preached on passage at least three different times in his ministry. I read one of these sermons this week and loved his perspective: "Had our Lord cast all His miracles in one mold men would have attached undue importance to the manner by which He worked, and would have surreptitiously thought more of it than the divine power by which the miracle was accomplished."

For example, Jesus healed a number of blind individuals and used diverse methods.

- In Matthew 9, two blind men regained their sight when Jesus simply touched their eyes.
- In Matthew 12, we read that Jesus healed a blind and mute man but we're not told how.
- In Mark 8, a blind man named Bart could see after Jesus simply spoke a word.
- In John 9, a man who was born blind was healed after Jesus spat on the ground to make some mud and then this mud was put on his eyes. He still couldn't see until he went and washed in the pool of Siloam. This man gave a one-sentence summary of his transformation when he declared in John 9:25: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

By the way, since more than 90 people shared sentence summaries of how they were saved (between my wall and the church wall), I decided to sprinkle some of these sentences throughout the sermon. I was blown away by this response!

I'm hoping you'll be encouraged by the various methods God uses and if you're not saved yet, that you will repent, believe, and receive Jesus Christ today. Who knows, God might use this sermon to lead you to salvation!

- After a car accident when I was 21 years old...I knew I would not have gone to Heaven if I died...
- He used a heavenly 2x4 across my head. And then, he brought wonderful believers into my life...it all started with one invite from a friend to "check out this church", which I reluctantly accepted, and the rest is His-story.
- I accepted Christ as my Savior at a summer Youth Camp.
- I chose to follow Jesus as a child and my mom led me to Christ. I had some years of wandering and living in deliberate sin and the death of my brother in law slapped me in the face with repentance and renewed commitment to the Lord.
- Jail, Cell 121. And a 90-year-old man coming to visit me every Sunday.

The message of the gospel always remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people. We'll totally see this in our passage today. This mystifying miracle is found only in the Gospel of Mark and it's the only healing that takes place gradually as Jesus uses a two-step process to open the eyes of a blind man.

Turn to Mark 8:22-26 and listen to God's Word: "And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'"

I see three truths that we can lock into from this passage.

- Minister to those in misery
- Watch the Master show mercy
- Be motivated to live on mission

1. Minister to those in misery.

Check out verse 22: "And they came to Bethsaida." This is a village on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee, near the mouth of the upper Jordan River. It's where Philip, Peter and Andrew grew up. Some friends of a blind man find out Jesus has arrived so they do two things that we're called to do as well.

- Bring people to Jesus. Look at the next phrase, "And some people brought to him a blind man..." The word "brought" has the idea of carrying, so you know it takes them some effort. This is similar to what the four friends did for their paralyzed buddy when they tore the roof apart to lower him to the Lord in Mark 2:3

- Beg Jesus to touch them. After bringing this man to Jesus, they "begged him to touch him." To "beg" means to "to invite; to come to the side of." Now that their friend is in proximity to Jesus they start praying and pleading for Him to touch him.

Do you have friends who push you closer to Christ or are they pulling you away from Him? Who can you think of right now that God wants you to bring to Jesus? Do you know of someone in misery? If so, it's time to minister by bringing them close to Jesus and then begin begging Him to touch your friend or family member.

These salvation sentences explain how important faithful friends are...

- I was saved because I saw two people who were Christians and I wanted what they had.
- I ran into an old friend that was NOTHING like I remembered him, and he was literally glowing with joy! I had to have whatever he had, and what he had was Christ!
- We had some friends that wanted to take our daughter to church when she was six years old and we decided that we needed to be the ones to take our children to church. We went that Sunday and were saved that day after the pastor gave a very convicting message.
- A Halloween party invitation from a person I hadn't seen in years is directly responsible for the chain of events that lead to my salvation.
- I was saved because of the witness of a friend and the faithful prayers of an aunt and two cousins.
- People continuously showing up and speaking truth, even when I didn't want them to.

2. Watch the Master show mercy.

Don't you love watching what Jesus does? He is personal, He shows mercy in private and there's often a process involved.

- Personal. I love how personal the first part of Mark 8:23 is as Christ makes physical contact with him: "And He took the blind man by the hand..." The sense of touch would be elevated for a blind person so this no doubt meant a lot to him. I imagine Jesus leading this man around potholes and people in his path. In our culture when you shake hands with someone, you are communicating warmth and openness but when you hold hands it's much more tender.

After my freshman year at Moody Bible Institute, I spent the summer in Zimbabwe, teaching at a Bible College. I stayed with the male students in a dormitory on the other end of the campus. After tossing and turning my first night because of both the heat and excitement of being there, I got up and made my way to the dining hall which was located on the other end of the soccer field. As I walked with the students, one young man came up to me and took me by the hand and held on tightly. I was OK with this for about three seconds but then I started sweating and became uncomfortable.

I looked around and saw my American teammates laughing at me but then I looked at the smile on the face of the college student who was studying to be a pastor and recognized that this was his way of saying he wanted to be close to his teacher. When I realized it was a cultural expression of honor and respect, I relaxed and we walked all the way across the field holding hands. I should add that I got up early every day after this and sped across the field before anyone could hold my hand!

- Private. Just like he did for the deaf and mute man in Mark 7:33, Jesus "led him out of the village." Listen. We grow when we get away and gather with God and His people. Abraham was taken away from Ur. Lot left Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses left Pharaoh's

household. Make sure you have alone time with Jesus. God brought you here today on purpose for His purposes. He knows you completely and you matter to Him. Jesus leads lost and blind sinners to Himself and we know from John 6:44 that if the Father doesn't call us, we won't come: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

We see how personal Jesus is and how He uses church gatherings for His purposes with some more salvation sentences.

- Was saved as a freshman in high school at youth group led by Pastor Ed.
- My grandma and my youth group.
- I was seven years old at AWANA when I made an intentional decision to believe in my Savior who loves me unconditionally (even though I was very bad at memorizing Bible verses)!!!
- My husband's faithful guiding led me to seek a relationship with the Lord. After a few months of attending Edgewood I was saved during a tithing message!

Years ago I read a book entitled, **What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?** I came across what's been called the Engel Scale that really helped me understand how Jesus moves people along a path toward salvation. This is very encouraging because if God can use me to help someone take the next step on the road to salvation, he can use anyone. That also means that I haven't failed if the person doesn't get saved. I also like this visual because it reminds me that my efforts should not stop at conversion because we're called to make disciples, not just converts.

Jesus ministered personally and privately and with this man, we can see a process that He followed.

• **Process.**

Let's spend some time now on the process Jesus used to bring sight to this blind man in Mark 8:23-25. Everything Jesus does is intentional, deliberate and purposeful. This is no accident and we know there's not a problem with a lack of power on His part.

STAGE ONE

- "And when He had spit on His eyes..." Aren't you glad that we don't have to mimic this method today? Not sure how that would go over in an outreach event. Spit was thought to have medicinal properties...but it still feels gross to me. When I was young my mom would often lick her finger and put it on a cut I had. Maybe this is where she got the idea?
- "And laid His hands on him..." After the warm spit hits his eyes Jesus immediately uses His hands and touches him. Remember he couldn't see anything but could feel everything.
- "He asked him, 'Do you see anything?'" Jesus asks him a question to get him to participate and to respond.
- "And He looked up and said, 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking.'" This reminds me of the scene in Lord of the Rings when the "Ents" (trees) come to life and start walking around! It's interesting that the man knew what trees looked like, so maybe he had not been born blind.

Can you imagine what it was like to go from total darkness to bright light and to start seeing color and movement as unfocused images begin to pulsate through his previously deadened optic nerves?

The second phase of his healing takes place in Mark 8:25.

STAGE TWO

- "Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again..." This is what his friends begged Jesus to do but He actually did much more – He took the man by the hand, He led him away, He spit on his eyes, He laid His hands on him, He asked him a question and then He laid His hands on him again. This reminds me of the time parents want Jesus to touch their children in Mark 10. Jesus does way more than that in verse 16: "And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them."
- "And he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." The first thing he saw was Jesus. The Greek indicates that he saw and continued to see both near and far. The progression is vivid here – three different Greek words are used – he eyes are opened, his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. The word for "clearly" means "brightly, shining, resplendent." He could read the big letters on the eye chart and all the small ones, too! He probably started singing, "I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see!"

Don't miss that healing the blind was a sign that Jesus was the promised Messiah or Savior. In other words, people would know that Jesus was the promised one because he fulfilled prophecy. Check out Isaiah 35:5: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened..." In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus quotes another passage in Isaiah and tells His listeners that this 700-year old prophecy is being fulfilled in their hearing: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to

proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind.” And in Luke 7:20-22, John the Baptist wants to make sure Jesus is who He says He is: “Are you the One who is to come or should we look for another?” Here’s what Jesus says: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight...”

A Two-Step Miracle

Let’s ponder for a few minutes why Jesus may have done this miracle in two stages. Before listing some possibilities, we know it can’t be because of some lack of power on His part. On top of that, it’s really OK to not know and just rest in His sweet sovereignty and accept His plans and purposes even if we don’t fully understand. We should never put God in a box.

Knowing that any explanation is speculation, here are some possibilities.

1. To grow this man’s weak faith. Jesus didn’t just want to restore his sight but to also transform his heart. As he started to see, his faith increased.
2. To show that Jesus ministers differently with different people. This means you shouldn’t try to copy someone else and it’s a reminder that we don’t all get better at the same rate or in the same way.
3. To let us know that Jesus longs to touch us more than once. Some of us can give a sentence or two about our salvation but we’ve drifted in our discipleship. You might be saved but you’re not sanctified, forgiven but not fruitful, or even a member and not living on mission. Don’t think you’re good to go when Jesus wants you to grow.
4. To remind us that God often does a little before He does a lot. Zechariah 4:10 says to “not despise the day of small things.”
5. To point us to the time we will see Jesus face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”
6. To teach and train the disciples. When a text of Scripture is a bit difficult to understand, it’s important to consider the context because a text out of context is a pretext for a proof-text. Here’s what we see when we do that. This passage essentially ends the first part of the Gospel of Mark where we’ve been focusing on Jesus as servant. The next section begins the presentation of Jesus as Savior. We’ll pick back up in Mark in January.

In the previous passage Jesus basically told the disciples that they were blind. Look at Mark 8:18: “Having eyes do you not yet see?” and in Mark 8:21 He asks, “Do you not yet understand?” Then in the passage following this one, we read of Peter’s confession of faith in verse 29: “You are the Christ.”

Jesus is opening their eyes to the truth of who He is, and it’s a process. They just needed to take the next step, just like us. What’s your next step?

Here are some more salvation sentences that show a process...

- After a life of really bad choices and tremendous guilt God pretty much kicked me and said "Hey.... follow me with all your heart and I'll break your chains that keep you in the hands of the enemy. You are my child and I will love you forever."
- Though I had found all the worldly success, I had found no fulfillment in life, which led me to searching out God.
- God allowed me to get to the lowest place I needed to be so my hard head would have no doubts it was Him that saved me from my mess of a life.

Let’s summarize. The message of the gospel always remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people. Minister to those in misery and then watch the Master show mercy. That leads to our final point.

3. Be motivated to live on mission.

There’s a positive and a negative command in verse 26. The man is told where to go and where not to go. The key is to obey, whether we understand it or not. Look at the first part of verse 26: “And he sent him to his home.” Someone has said, “If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.”

Shortly after I became a Christian, I read another book that radically transformed my understanding of evangelism called, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples* by Win and Charles Arn. Their premise is built on the Greek word *oikos*, (not the Greek yogurt, which tastes like sour cream). *Oikos* is the New Testament word for “household.” In English, “household” means the nuclear family. In Greek, however, its usage was much broader and included family, neighbors, co-workers, friends and those with whom we come into regular contact.

Each of us has an *oikos* made up of family, extended family, friends, neighbors and co-workers as well. This is our mission field. Studies show that 75-90% of people come to Christ through the influence of a friend or a family member.

I did a quick breakdown on the salvation sentences posted on Facebook on Thursday – more responses have come in since so it's not completely accurate. Almost 30% mention that it was a time of trouble that led them to Christ. Not quite a third mention the impact of a friend or family member and over a third came to Christ through the influence of a church service or student ministry.

On this Labor Day weekend, most of us are thinking about our jobs by taking a day off on Monday. I wonder what would happen if we started thinking of our work as a platform for witness and worship?

Here are a few more testimonies that show how God can use us where we work:

- A persistent friend/co-worker kept inviting me to church and I finally caved.
- [An Edgewood member] was my co-worker at a bank. He witnessed to me every day about a God who loved me and wanted a relationship with me. He asked me one day where I thought I would go if I died that day. I knew! I asked God to forgive my sins and live in me that very afternoon!
- Through a special friend at work God brought me back to church, and into a life [growth] group where through worship music I came to saving faith.

I came across a teaching series by Matt Chandler this past week on RightNow Media called, "Work as Worship." I highly recommend it. Let's watch this brief promo and if you're interested you can watch the three-part series for free by opening an account through our website. → [Show promo for Chandler video.](#)

As we wrap up today, check out the last phrase of Mark 8:26: "Do not even enter the village." That seems harsh, doesn't it? What was it about Bethsaida that made Jesus tell the man to stay away? Lots of miracles were done there but because of their hard hearts Jesus had pronounced a curse on this village in Matthew 11:21-22: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you."

Jesus had rejected them because they wouldn't receive Him. They tuned Him out so He turned away. They had been given light but they gorged on the deeds of darkness. As a result the community was judged but individuals were still invited to respond. It sure feels like America has been judged, doesn't it? We've turned away from His Word and His Ways. We'll focus more on this in two weeks.

But there's still time for you individually to respond...but don't delay!

Do you have a salvation sentence? We all start out spiritually blind and have been given a sin sentence according to Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death..." The man was honest when he couldn't see clearly and he told Jesus, "I see men as trees walking around." It's time for you to be totally truthful about your condition. Admit that you are a sinner and repent from your sins.

It's time today to receive Jesus Christ so that you can see! Listen how Romans 6:23 ends: "...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Here's one more salvation sentence: "At the altar on my knees with a deacon leading me down the Romans road." I invite you to come up front and settle your salvation so you too can have a story to share.

Closing Song: "O Great God"

Mark 11:17

House of Prayer

"Has It Not Been Written: My House Shall Be Called a House of Prayer?" Mark 11:17

A preacher's young daughter noticed that her father always paused and bowed his head for a moment before starting his sermon. One day she asked him why. "Well, honey," he began, thrilled that his daughter was paying attention during his sermons, "I'm asking the Lord to help me preach a good sermon." To which she replied, "Then, how come He doesn't do it?"

Would you pause and pray with me right now before I begin preaching?

This past Wednesday was Parent Night at AWANA. I enjoyed hanging out with Megan and was very impressed with the caliber of the teaching and shepherding and loving that takes place in this ministry. When I was upstairs for council time Lisa Mayback did a great job communicating the Bible to the girls. While I was sitting next to Megan, I was able to see a girl in front of us as she opened

up her Bible and Sunday's bulletin fell out. I noticed that she had something written on the cover and so I leaned forward and asked her what it said. She held it up and said: A little is always a lot in the hands of the Lord. That was the summary of the sermon last week. I applauded her for writing it down and she said something like: You said it a lot so it was easy to remember. Let me give you today's sermon in a sentence: Don't play; it's time to pray.

Jesus certainly preached some great sermons, didn't He? The Sermon on the Mount comes to mind. Much of his preaching was done through parables like the one about the prodigal son and the teaching about talents. People admired Jesus and as we learned last week, they often ran to greet Him so they could hear more questions like this one: "How many loaves do you have?" His compassion led Him to feed the 5,000 and His tenderness caused children to flock to Him. Most of us picture Him as gentle and kind, and He was, but there's another side to the Savior. We tasted this two weeks ago when Jesus asked this convicting question from Mark 12:24: "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?"

We need the complete picture of Christ, not just the caricatures that we like. He was the perfect embodiment of grace and truth, of mercy and holiness, of love and zeal. And in our penchant for promoting only the characteristics of Christ that we like by emphasizing the utilitarian aspects of what works for us, we have marginalized His majesty. We would rather avoid those passages where He seems untamable and unpredictable, especially when His words make us wince and His actions make us uncomfortable.

Today we're going to study a sermon that Jesus preached and a question that He asked that will smash some of your images of Him. The timing is the day after Palm Sunday, in the last days before He was crucified. The setting is Jerusalem, specifically the Temple. Please turn in your Bible to Mark 11:11. After hearing the cheering and the hosannas, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the Temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve." The phrase "looked around" means that He examined everything closely. This reminds me of what Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 2:13: "examining the walls of Jerusalem."

God's people actually had three different Temples.

1. Solomon's Temple. Almost one thousand years earlier, Solomon constructed the first Temple and we read that God's Shekinah glory filled it so full that the priests couldn't get in (see 1 Kings 8:10-11). The Temple was where God dwelt and where His people could meet with Him. It was the holiest place in the land and the focal point of their worship. Hundreds of years later, this Temple was destroyed and God's people were sent to Babylon.

2. Zerubbabel's Temple. When they returned seventy years later, a second Temple was constructed, which was nothing compared to Solomon's. It's been called Zerubbabel's Temple (see Haggai 2:3) and it lasted for about 500 years.

3. Herod's Temple. This was an amazing edifice and was built as a grandiose gift to the Jews and as a tribute to Herod's haughtiness, taking 46 years to finish. To give you a feel for the size, the columns were so mammoth that it took three people with their hands outstretched to surround a column at its base. [Demonstrate] Everything in the Temple symbolized something and was used to help communicate God's power and purposes. For example, when children would ask about the meaning behind the pillars, parents would answer: "Our God is so great that He upholds the heavens and the earth."

The Temple was humongous and it was huge in the eyes of every Jewish person. What Jesus observed during His inspection tour grieved Him greatly. He saw religious ceremonies carried out with no relationship to the Spirit. He saw commercialism, injustice, exploitation, hypocrisy and a disregard for the holiness of His Father. But because it was late in the day He decided to wait until the next day when more people would be there during regular "business hours" before doing anything about it.

This shows the Lord's patience and reminds us that He waits so that we'll respond as stated in 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." But the very next verse says that the Day of the Lord will come...and they're about to experience His wrath on Monday morning. But that night he left Jerusalem and went to the neighboring suburb of Bethany, where he and the disciples spent the night with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. According to John 11:18, Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. It was no longer safe for Him in Jerusalem and so He did not spend any more nights there, except for His last.

Drop down to Mark 11:15. The next day, Jesus came back to Jerusalem and immediately entered the Temple area. You get the distinct impression that He wasted no time getting there. This was the Messiah on a mission. The Temple area is also called the "Court of the Gentiles," a place where non-Jewish people were allowed to come to pray and to praise Almighty God. This was a walled, marble-paved section to the south side of the Temple and was about three football fields long and around 250 yards wide. Allow me to show you what it looked like [show PPT slide].

Would someone mind standing up and reading Mark 11:15-19 for us? “On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, ‘Is it not written: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.”

When Jesus got to Jerusalem he made a beeline to the Temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. This word literally means “to eject.” While many wanted Him to attack the Romans and set up His kingdom, Jesus launched a surprise attack against “religion.” Like an Old Testament prophet, Jesus is acting out a parable – only He’s not acting; He’s indignant and irate. I’d like us to watch this brief clip from the Jesus video to help us picture what this must have been like [play clip].

This wasn’t the first time Jesus was angry for we read in Mark 3:5: “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...” This was also not the first time He had cleansed the Temple. In John 2:14-17, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus had gone into the Temple area and this time used a whip to wipe out the makeshift market. As the disciples watched Him explode with indignation they remembered this verse from Psalm 69:9: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

Before we go much further it’s important to set some background. Please turn to Deuteronomy 14:24-26: “But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep...” Exodus 30:13-16 adds that when people would travel from a long distance to come to the Temple they had to pay an annual temple tax but they couldn’t use Greek or Roman money because of the graven images on it. They would then change their money into Temple money so they could pay the tax. In addition, because most people wouldn’t bring animals with them to the Temple they would have to buy what they needed right there. All of this was acceptable.

What wasn’t acceptable was that the section of the Temple that was supposed to be for Gentiles had been turned into a combination Stock Exchange and flea market. But what was worse is that the exchange rates were exorbitant and the surcharge on the animals was outlandish. While people could buy doves elsewhere in town, the priests would do an inspection and usually declare them unacceptable. They would then receive a kickback from the temple dove-sellers after people would buy their “acceptable” ones. One commentator said that the price for a dove purchased outside the Temple was the equivalent of a day’s wages but inside the Temple it was equivalent to 45 day’s wages. Exchange rates could easily consume half a day’s wage for the average person. Jesus had no tolerance for this. Not only was it wrong but the Temple had been trivialized and people were paying, not praying in God’s holy house.

Jesus then did three things [demonstrate by knocking over tables].

* He overturned the tables of the money changers. There could have been twenty tables of merchants more interested in profiteering than listening to the prophets.

* He overturned the benches of those selling doves. The coins are clanging on the marble floor while feathers are flying everywhere.

* He blocked anyone from carrying merchandise through the Temple courts. This sacred structure had become a shortcut to the Mount of Olives. There’s something else going on. If you study Leviticus and Numbers, you’ll see that the priests were constantly bringing in animals to slaughter on the altar. They would sprinkle the blood on the altar of incense and then they’d have to carry the dead carcasses back out again. In addition, other supplies like firewood, oil for the lamps, and sharp knives would be brought in. Ray Stedman suggests that there was a steady progression of priests through the Temple all day long.

But on this day, Jesus not only stopped the sales; He stopped the sacrifices. This is highly symbolic because in just a few days, His body would become the final sacrifice for sin, rendering all other sacrifices completely useless. By the way, this act of stopping the Temple worship sealed His death as verse 18 says that the chief priests and the teachers of the law “began looking for a way to kill Him.” This gives me spiritual goose bumps because Jesus was essentially condemning the entire sacrificial system. The Temple would be destroyed because Jesus was now going to become the meeting place between people and God where sins would be dealt with once for all.

After preaching this sermon with tremendous visuals, he once again utilized a question to zero in on the main truth: “Is it not written:

My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?" The answer is obvious and yet very unsettling. Of course prayer is what God's house is for and that's what it should be for. We see Jesus appealing to Scripture time and again. We would all benefit by quoting the Bible more when we speak. Jesus loved to say, "It is written." One of our teammates in Mexico once told me that he was trying to share a verse of Scripture in every conversation he had with someone. That's a goal we should all have. This quotation is directly from Isaiah 56:7 and Jesus is appealing to the purpose behind God's Temple. I see two main points here:

1. God's house is for prayer. Prayer must have first place.

2. God's heart is for all peoples. 1 Kings 8:41-43 establishes that God's people were to always seek to be a blessing to the people around them. God had made provision for them to come to Him because He is a global God.

Jesus then quotes from Jeremiah 7:11 (He really knew His Bible, didn't He?) to show that like thieves these men were extorting and stealing and then finding refuge in the temple: "But you have made it a den of robbers." The word "robber" as used during the time of Jesus meant one who was violent or even a terrorist. Those who should have ushered nonbelievers into the Temple courts were terrorizing them and then seeking refuge in the supposed safety of spirituality. They felt like they could do whatever they wanted "out there" and then would "come in here" to be safe. No wonder Jesus was so worked up! We need to constantly guard ourselves so that we focus on prayer and on all peoples. It's too easy for us to just seek refuge in our rituals and in our religion while those who don't know Christ are prevented from coming close to Him.

Prayer Practices

A message like this can invoke feelings of guilt and a spirit of conviction. That can be a good thing if it motivates us to change. If Jesus were to examine our church and our lives like he did the Temple that Sunday night, what would He see? Here are some questions that come to mind:

- * Are all nations and nationalities welcome at PBC?
- * Do we flee to church to hide from our sins or to confess them?
- * Are we just going through religious rituals?
- * If Jesus were to show up here, what would He overturn?

I did an inventory this week both of our church and of my personal life. One reason I chose this passage is because of our six areas of emphasis according to our IMPACT statement (Instruction, Ministry, Prayer, Adoration, Caring and Telling others the gospel), I think prayer is our weakest link.

Let me apply this personally. When I interviewed for the position of Senior Pastor here at PBC over eight years ago, someone asked me a very good question about my prayer habits. I remember answering that I have a lot to learn about prayer and that I don't pray enough. As I look back over these past eight years I wish I could tell you that I've turned into a power-prayer. In fact, I'm not sure I've improved very much in this area. I confess that to you and ask that you would pray that God would make me more of a man of prayer.

Early this week I watched a video of Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, preaching a sermon called "My House Will Be Called a House of Prayer." I've heard this classic sermon several times but was moved again as I listened. You can access it by going to my blog at www.pontiacbible.org. Here are a couple quotes that struck me: "God's work must always have the aroma of prayer...the greatest thing you can learn is to learn how to pray."

We certainly need to make this place a place of prayer...and by God's grace we will. But God's house today is not a building, is it? According to 1 Corinthians 3:16, God lives in the lives of believers: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" That means that the house of prayer that God is looking for today is what takes place within born again believers.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your prayer life? Let me encourage you to nudge it up just one notch. If you're at a 3, don't feel like you have to be at a 10 by tomorrow. Every one of us can go up one degree.

Most of us don't need additional principles about prayer because we know that prayer is important; what we need are some prayer practices so that we actually pray more. In short we need to learn how to pray. I don't need to convince you why you should pray; instead I want to give you some ways to pray. In light of that, I came up with 10 prayer practices that I want to list briefly. I recognize that you probably won't resonate with each one but hopefully a handful will find some traction in your life. Whatever the case, it's

time to stop playing and start praying.

Samuel Chadwick summed up the need to prioritize prayer: "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. The devil fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. The devil laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."

1. Pray promptly. As soon as someone says, "Would you pray for me?" stop everything and pray right then and there. I love seeing people pray off in the corner on a Sunday or right here in the chairs after the service. Just this week in staff meeting Pastor Jeff asked for prayer for his messages during the fall retreat. I stopped the meeting and prayed for him.

2. Pray for proclaimers. PBC supports around twenty different missionaries. It's not easy to remember to pray for each one so let me make a suggestion. Either pick up copies of prayer letters in the hallway or contact our missionaries and get on their email list. Then, as soon as you read an update, pray for these proclaimers. Just this week, I heard from Roger and Maggie Bruehl regarding the fires in California, from Larry Thompson about a car accident his daughter was in, Keith and Carol Wilson regarding Egypt and the Varner's ministry in Russia. As soon as I read the letters I prayed for their requests. By the way, each of our small groups is praying for a missionary when they meet.

3. Pray for your pastors. Many of you pray for your pastors on a regular basis. Thank you and may your tribe increase. Did you know that the first church in Acts started in a prayer meeting? PBC also got its start in a prayer meeting.

4. Pray during the preaching. Several years ago a group of people gathered in a separate room and prayed during the sermon time. I would love to see that get started again. Since we are out of space one place to meet would be in the old kitchen. You could still hear the sermon and if you fall asleep, no one will know. Seriously, prayer is where the power is. Preaching must be wedded to God's power to get God's results.

5. Pray to worship properly. The problem that Jesus confronted was a disregard for God's holiness among His people. They were way too casual and careless in their approach to that which should have caused reverence. When you arrive here on Sundays do so with a sense of expectancy and awe.

6. Pursue all people. God's people had turned within and had neglected God's heart for all nations and nationalities and people groups. Everyone, regardless of skin color or background or lifestyle, must be welcome here. We can't just focus on "us four and no more." The church must always be open to those who are not yet believers.

7. Pray for the proclamation of the gospel on December 23rd. Please begin praying now for our Christmas Outreach at PTHS the Sunday before Christmas. Pray that God will give you courage to invite your friends, family members and co-workers who are searching for hope. And then pray that we will communicate the life-changing message of the gospel with grace and clarity. Vera Wahls is putting together a prayer team for this event. If you'd like to be a part of this please contact her.

9. Pray the passages of Scripture. One of the best ways to pray is to simply take God's Word and pray it back to Him. You may want to start with the Book of Psalms or take the prayers that Paul prayed in Colossians 1:9-14 and Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21 and make them your own.

9. Find a prayer partner. I know of some women who call each other every day just to pray together over the phone. Other moms meet here for Moms in Touch to pray for the schools in our area. Identify someone and then ask if they would be your prayer partner.

10. Pray for young people. Almost forty teenagers are at the fall retreat this weekend. Please pray for them. As a way to help you remember to pray for a student, there's a "Prayer Tree" set up in the hallway today that has names of particular high school students on it. Would you stop by and pick a student and then covenant to pray for him or her every day?

In order to practice what has been preached, I'd like you to take a few minutes right now and pray that God will make your life a life of prayer. You may want to take some of these suggestions and turn them into specific requests. Whatever you do, don't play... because it's time to pray.

It may help if you get into a posture of prayer. That may mean that you stay seated or stand or kneel or go to the back of the room or out in the aisle or up here at the front. Do whatever you need to do to focus so you can pray fervently.

Closing Song: "Listen to Your Children Praying"

Mark 12:18-27

Are You Not In Error?

"Are You Not in Error..." Mark 12:24

A father and son went fishing one day and while they were out in their boat, the boy suddenly became curious about the world around him and started asking questions. He asked his father, "Dad, what makes this boat float?" The father replied, "Don't rightly know, son." A little later, the boy looked at his father and asked, "Dad, how do fish breathe underwater?" Once again the father replied, "Don't rightly know, son."

A few minutes later the boy asked his father, "Dad, why is the sky blue?" Again, the father replied, "Don't rightly know, son." Finally, the boy asked, "Dad, do you mind me asking you all of these questions?" The father replied, "Of course not, son. If you don't ask questions, you never learn nothin.'" (Submitted by Gary Reinhardt)

Have you noticed how many people have questions for God? I'd like to hear some of the questions you've heard or asked yourself. Just shout them out.

Here are some that I've heard...

- * How could God allow someone so close to me to die?
- * Why didn't God stop the abuse I went through as a child?
- * Why are there so many hypocrites in the church?
- * If God is good why do bad things happen?
- * How did the Packers lose to the Bears last week?

Do you know that God has some questions for us? His first question appears in Genesis 3:9 and was asked specifically of Adam after he and Eve sinned and tried to hide from Him: "Where are you?" That question resonates across the centuries as God still wonders where everyone is in relation to Him. Humanity has been hiding from the Holy One ever since. Here's a question. Are you hiding from Him or have you been found?

For the next seven weeks we're going to look not at the questions we might have but at the questions that Christ has. There are some things that Jesus wants to know...and some things He wants us to know about ourselves.

As the master-teacher, Jesus asked a lot of questions. Depending on how you count them, there are over 180 recorded in the Gospels. Incidentally, He asked more questions than He answered. You don't have to go very far to find Him asking questions. When he was just 12 years old he was left behind in the Temple and Luke 2:46 says that he "was asking questions" of the teachers. In Luke 2:49 we hear his first questions: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

While it is not possible to categorize all of the questions, I see four different forms.

Kinds of Questions

1. Confirming questions. The answers to some of the questions Jesus asked were simply self-evident and easily answered. Jesus asked these kinds of questions to get people to verbally confirm the obvious. Examples of this include: "What is your name? What were you arguing about on the road? When I fed the 5,000, how much was left over? How many loaves do you have?" While the answers were obvious, the implications were often very unsettling.

2. Complex questions. Some of the questions Jesus asked were so profound that they forced people to rethink their positions and priorities, especially when the questions had no good answer like this one in Matthew 7:3: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Here's another one from Matthew 5:13: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?"

3. Comforting questions. Jesus also asked questions to communicate comfort to people. I'm reminded of what He asked the woman

caught in adultery in John 8:10-11: “‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

4. Convicting questions. Many questions that Jesus asked had a convicting force behind them, especially when he would answer a question with a question like He did in Mark 11:27-33. The Pharisees loved a good argument but Jesus rarely gave them one. Instead, He asked provocative and very personal questions. Turn to Matthew 15:2-3 for an example. A few Pharisees and some teachers of the law questioned why the disciples of Jesus broke the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate (I broke this one a lot growing up).

Jesus’ answer was stunning and very strong: “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” Here’s another one from Luke 6:46: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” Questions have a way of penetrating a person’s heart.

These convicting questions were not only directed at the enemies of Jesus, He also sent His disciples into a state of disequilibrium with questions like these from Mark 8:17-18: “Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?” Or this one, which had to hurt from Luke 8:25: “Where is your faith?” As one who has followed Christ for some time now, I’m personally convicted by this question in John 14:9: “Don’t you know me...even after I have been among you such a long time?”

The questions Jesus asked were used with pinpoint precision to get to the heart of a person’s problem. W.P. Merrill adds, “He came not to answer questions, but to ask them, not to settle men’s souls, but to provoke them.”

It’s fascinating to analyze some of the answers, or non-answers, that people gave in response to the questions of Jesus. Here are some of my favorites:

- * Matthew 22:46: “No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.”
- * Mark 3:4: “But they remained silent.”
- * Luke 14:6: “And they had nothing to say.”

As we go through this series you may be comforted or you may be convicted or you just may be quiet. Whatever the case, it’s my prayer that none of us will stay the same.

Here are some of the questions we’re going to ponder:

- * “How many loaves do you have?”
- * “Has it not been written: My house shall be called a house of prayer?”
- * “Do you want to get well?”
- * “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”
- * “Show me the coin...whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?”
- * “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

And today our text is found in Mark 12:24: “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”

Please turn in your Bibles to Mark 12. Let’s set the context. Palm Sunday has just taken place and it is now the last week of Jesus’ life. Jesus is involved with a series of confrontations with the religious and political parties who are trying to take Him out.

In the beginning of this chapter Jesus tells a parable that makes the religious leaders upset. He essentially tells them that they and their forefathers got rid of all the prophets they didn’t like and now they were going to kill the Father’s son as well. They wanted to arrest Him right there but because of the crowds, they left Him and went away to regroup.

Their plan was to send their best to Jesus to trap Him in his words and so some Pharisees and some Herodians come together. Interestingly, these two groups can’t stand each other but they don’t mind working in tandem to get rid of a common enemy. After posing what they thought was an unanswerable query, they’re faced with some convicting questions from Christ Himself. Verse 17 tells us “that they were amazed at Him.”

After these two groups are put in their place another group takes their best shot. The Sadducees are the spiritual snobs of the

country and without a doubt they thought they could silence Jesus and put an end to His popularity among the people, and in the process, bump up a few percentage points in the political polls (sounds like they could have fit in well with our culture).

They were highly educated, extremely influential, and very wealthy and were known as experts in the interpretation of Scripture. There are a couple things to keep in mind about them.

- * They only believed in the first five books of the Bible.
- * They did not believe in the resurrection, the afterlife, or angels.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, has commented on their rudeness (he describes them as being “as rude as aliens”), and on their harsh spirit as they passed judgment on others. That’s why they were “sad, you see?” (That was my attempt at a little humor). They considered themselves enlightened, but as we will see, Jesus is about to enlighten them.

Follow along in Mark 12:18-27 as I narrate what happens.

Their set-up begins as they respectfully refer to Jesus as “Teacher.” They then quote from Deuteronomy 25:5 -- the part of the Bible that they accept as authoritative:

“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her.” They then describe a very hypothetical and even ludicrous situation, thinking they had a question Jesus could not answer and that He would look foolish even trying.

They imagine that there were seven brothers. The first one married and died and then the next one married the widow. It was the same with the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh brothers as they marry her in succession after the brother before each one dies. After all the brothers die, then the woman dies too. Here’s their question: “At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

I picture the Sadducees strutting around, high-fiving each other because their question was so amazing. They had probably rehearsed it many times before and watched others falter and fold. No one had ever been able to answer this question. They were painting a problem, a theological conundrum that in their minds was both absurd and unanswerable.

Instead, Jesus answers their question with His own question. I imagine their faces falling and their eyes looking around to see who was watching them. Check out this convicting question: “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?” The word “error” means to wander astray and the way in which the question is asked expects an affirmative answer. Because they didn’t accept all the passages of Scripture and denied the power of God, they were in a bad place.

Jesus then does some teaching by pointing out that resurrection life is far different and better than this life in verse 25: “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” With this one statement he punctures their proposition and shows that they don’t get it. Did you catch the word “when”? He doesn’t say if the dead rise but when they rise.

I like what Warren Wiersbe says about this passage: “Resurrection is not the restoration of life as we know it; it is the entrance into a new life that is different.” Heaven will be a completely different dimension than the life we now know. Weddings will not be performed because as we learned last week we will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

We will certainly remember our spouse but every relationship we have here will pale in comparison to the relationship we will have with Jesus. The resurrected life will transcend earthly relationships. We don’t become angels, but like angels, we will obey completely and we will worship wholeheartedly. Like angels, we will enjoy an existence that transcends earthly limitations and we will never die.

And then He clobbers them by crafting another question in verse 26 with a quote from the very section of Scripture they subscribe to in Exodus 3:3-6: “Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, [this expects an affirmative answer because without doubt they were familiar with this story] in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’”

Since the patriarchs are still alive, though their bodies are in the ground, there must be such a thing as the resurrection. Notice this passage does not say “I was the God of...” but “I am the God of...” He is the God of the living because He is the living God. As I often say in funerals, this is the land of the dying and when we die we go to the land of the living.

By teaching truth from a passage that they personally liked, Jesus proves his superiority over the Sadducees. Let me make the obvious point that expository preaching follows the example of Jesus by pulling truth even from the different tenses of verbs. All Scripture, according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is "... God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 5:18: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

Jesus doesn't leave it there. Not only does he make the Sadducees squirm, He declares unequivocally, and loudly I might add: "You are badly mistaken." That means they were in extreme error and totally off track. Some prosperity preachers today avoid ending a sermon on a sour note but the sermons of Jesus often ended on a note of correction or outright rebuke.

I have two closing questions that come right from this passage. We must answer them correctly or risk being in error ourselves.

Closing Questions

1. Do you know it? Jesus still asks this question: "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures?" How well do you know the Word of God? The Sadducees focused on social status more than the Scriptures, picking and choosing what they wanted from God's Word. They probably had the Torah memorized but it hadn't tenderized them. They claimed to accept the authority of Moses but missed that he taught that life continues after death. Do you know it? Are you reading it everyday? Make sure you're doing whatever you can to become a student of the Word of God. Plug into a Sunday morning IMPACT class. Join a small group. Attend one of our women's Bible studies. Men, make the monthly men's breakfasts a priority – Pastor Dick is teaching this Saturday on this very topic: "Becoming a Man of the Word."

2. Do you show it? Jesus wants to know: "Are you not in error because you do not know...the power of God?" Has the information led to transformation? Do you know the passages and the power? Do you show it? The Sadducees denied the reality of the afterlife and thus the power of the resurrection because it defied logic. At some point we must move from just learning the Bible to living the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:5 describes a group of people who know it but don't show it: "Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."

The Bible has a lot to say about God's power. Philippians 3:10: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection..." The power of the resurrection comes only to those who personally know Christ through the rebirth. The word "know" in the Bible has more to do with experience than with intellect. What we've been talking about this morning ties right into our mission statement: To connect people to Jesus and equip them to be growing and faithful followers. After knowing we should be growing and then showing the power of God to others.

Putting it into Practice

1. Read the Bible contemplatively. We have some Bible reading plans available at the Resource Center today. Let me share an ancient practice called *Lectio Divina*. Before I do, let me give you a caution to not approach the Bible mystically or magically. This is a Latin expression that can be translated as a contemplative reading of the Bible. I'm using some insights from Pastor Bob Bauer and have added some elements of my own.

- * Reading. Read a passage slowly with reverence and in an attitude of expectancy. Savor each word, whether it's comforting or convicting.
- * Reflecting. Enter into the text by meditating on its meaning.
- * Responding. Pray the passage back to God, using the text as the framework.
- * Resting. Take some time to think and ponder the implications of this passage for your own life.

Let me demonstrate. On Friday I read Mark 10. After Jesus interacted with the rich young ruler, verse 21 says that "Jesus looked at him and loved him." I had glossed over that before. Jesus loves lost people. I often get upset with them or judge them but Jesus looks at and loves those who are lost.

2. Ask God to demonstrate His power in a specific area of your life. It's so easy for us to lose heart when we don't see things happening. 2 Timothy 1:7 says that God has "given us a spirit of power." We don't have to request more power because He's already given it to us. In what area do you need to trust God to demonstrate His power?

3. Start using questions when you talk to people. Begin to ask questions of those who don't know Jesus. Here's one: "Tell me, where are you on your spiritual journey?" Or, here's one I often use when someone expresses how things have been going without God in their life: "How's that been working for you?" The Evangelism Explosion question is outstanding as well: "If you were to die today and God asked you why He should let you into heaven, what would you say?"

4. Use tools to teach people about Jesus. One of the tools we use at Pontiac Bible Church to help people both know it and show it is our web ministry. Let me tell you a story. Several months ago I called our daughter Emily who is going to school in Chicago. I asked her what she was doing and she told me that she was riding the "L" and listening to her iPod. I asked what she was listening to and she told me that she was listening to me. When I asked her to explain she told me that she was listening to that past Sunday's sermon. She's subscribed to our sermon podcasts through iTunes which automatically downloads the sermons every Sunday afternoon to her iPod.

I talked to someone recently who told me that she had listened to the first two sermons in our Worship Matters series online before she even came the first time.

Did you know that in just the first nine months of this year, our website has had over 47,000 visits? Guess how many different countries this represents? 137! I receive regular emails from people in India, Australia and the U.K. who have come across our church website and have been blessed by the content. Indeed, the web is world-wide.

Mark 12:28-34

Living a Life of Love

Play video: Love People, Not Evangelism

I love how Jeremy took the opportunity to share the gospel with Shane and didn't give up. What kept him going? Why did he persevere? In short, it was love.

Just this week, Christianity Today ran a story on the State of Evangelism in America. Here's their conclusion: "...We found that most feel a responsibility to share the gospel and that most even feel comfortable doing so, but very few actually do it."

Stephen Mattson, in a blog post called, "Bad Reasons to Not Evangelize," gives some possible reasons why many of us don't share our faith with others.

1. We fear controversy.

In our current cultural climate, that is growing increasingly caustic toward Christianity, many choose to remain quiet about Christ. Dr. Robert P. George, the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, spoke this week and said, "It's no longer easy to be a faithful Christian in America. Our culture increasingly condemns Christian beliefs as bigoted and hateful...they despise us if we refuse to call good evil and evil good." Incidentally, according to 2 Timothy 3:1, even more perilous times are coming in the last days.

2. We're ashamed.

Instead of boldly proclaiming Christ as the only way to heaven, some today are afraid to even admit they are Christians. Did you hear the report out of Sudan this week about a pregnant woman who refused to renounce her Christianity and has now been sentenced to death by hanging? Friends, let's not bail on our faith but rather become even bolder for Christ. If you're ashamed now what will happen when our society gets even more acidic toward Christians? We must come back to Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..."

3. We don't really care.

We've become preoccupied, filling our lives with entertainment, tasks and a litany of technological distractions. Some of us are simply trying to survive and so we're not thinking about those who don't know Christ. Because we seldom think of the eternal realities of heaven and hell, we live as if this life is all there is.

I want to propose that the way to raise the evangelism intensity at Edgewood is for us to increase in our love for God for others. Actually, if we love God with everything we have and love others as much as we love ourselves, we will engage in evangelism. We

won't be able to stop.

But we have a lot of work to do, don't we? One of my new pastor friends shared an illustration this week that I found very moving. He reminded us that there are approximately 400,000 people in the QCA. As best he's been able to determine, roughly 200,000 are connected with some kind of faith community, leaving 200,000 who aren't. With about 215 churches in the QCA, our task is far from complete. In order to connect the disconnected, we're going to have to intentionally and purposely live on mission 365/24/7. It's not going to get done unless we change the way we've been doing some things.

We've been learning how to live on mission right where God has placed us, beginning in our homes and in our neighborhoods [show map]. Three weeks ago we focused on making sure that Christ is Lord of each of our lives so that we'll be able to give the gospel out with respect and gentleness. Two weeks ago we were challenged to break down barriers and build bridges with those who don't yet know Christ. Last week we established that moms and grandmas can make a kingdom impact with, or without, the help of a dad.

Please turn in your Bibles to Mark 12:28-31 and let's read this passage together:

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Here's the setting. It's the last week of Jesus' life and He's just cleared out the temple and chased away the money-changers and now his enemies unleash a hurricane of hatred toward Him. At the end of chapter 11, the chief priests, teachers of the law and elders confront Christ with a question. In 12:13 we read, "Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words." These divergent groups, that didn't even like each other, banded together to try to trap Jesus.

In verse 19, the Sadducees ask him a crazy question about the afterlife. I love the answer Jesus gives them in verse 24: "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?" May that never be said of the people of Edgewood!

After making the Sadducees sad, one of the Pharisees, a teacher, who had heard this debate, was drawn to Jesus and asked the following question in verse 28: "Which is the first commandment of all?" The New Living Translations renders it this way: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

He wants to know which one has the most weight. This was an often-debated question among the religious leaders. They liked to count and categorize the commands, arguing about which ones could be blown off and which had to be kept. We generally think of there being 10 Commandments but the Pharisees actually added all of them and came up with 613 – 248 were positive: "do this" or "do that" and 365 were negative: "don't do this, don't do that." For them, a "don't a day" kept the devil away!

The answer Jesus gives summarizes the entire teaching of Scripture: Love God and love others. Notice verse 29: "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.'" The top priority, the consummate command is so important that Jesus quotes "The Shema," which literally means, "to hear." These words are found in Deuteronomy 6 and 11 and Numbers 15 and were recited by every pious Jew in the morning and evening, and some still do so today. This statement affirms the existence and unity of God and the community that He has with His people.

Notice that Jesus goes right to Scripture for the answer and He establishes the Sovereignty of God by calling Him Lord, or Yahweh.

The answer Jesus gives is two-fold.

1. Love God with all you have.

Mark 12:30: "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment." I'm struck by at least three truths in this verse.

Love is more than a feeling. It's a command but also a privilege. You and I must make a conscious decision to love God. Love is principally an action; not primarily an emotion. He could have chosen one of four Greek words for love. Eros refers to romantic love. Storgē speaks of the love of things. Phileo is the love between brothers. But this verse uses the verb *agapao*, which speaks of a never-ending, unchanging, unconditional, all-consuming love. This kind of love for God is a choice; a matter of the will driven by obedience and sacrifice.

Love leads to a relationship. Jesus personalizes a relationship with the Lord by using the phrase, "your God." That leads to a question. Is He your God? Warren Wiersbe points out that Jesus' answer reveals that we are to live "not by rules but by

relationships.”

Love is to be comprehensive. Notice the four uses of the word “all,” which literally means, “the whole.” God’s whole-hearted love for us cannot be answered with half-hearted commitment from us. By listing the heart, soul, mind, and strength, no area is left out. We’re to love Him with everything we have – with devotion in our hearts, with passion in our souls, with thoughtfulness in our heads, and with passionate energy through our hands and our feet. We’re to love Him ahead of everything else and love Him with every faculty of our being. Friends, God’s limitless love for us should drive out any lukewarm love that we may have for Him.

2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

True to form, Jesus goes back to Scripture again and this time quotes Leviticus 19:18: “And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The people standing there that day didn’t see this one coming because these two commands were never linked together before. I want you to notice that agapao love is used again. We’re to love our neighbors with limitless and unconditional love. We’re to love our neighbors with the same kind of love we have for ourselves. Give others the attention we give ourselves. We must think of our neighbors as much, or more, than we think of ourselves.

It’s easy to miss something at this point. Jesus is quoting a phrase from the tail end of a verse that is found in a long discussion about sacrifices and harvesting and paying workers. Let me read the first part: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” That means that we must give up our grudges and grievances and refuse to take vengeance on someone who has wronged us. And we’re to love our neighbors because God says, “I am Yahweh.”

Don’t be like the woman in Florida this week who had her neighbor’s mobile home bulldozed because she didn’t like them. When asked why she did it, she said, “because people who lived there were unsavory...” She considered what she did a “favor to her neighborhood.” She’s now facing a felony charge.

Let’s be honest. Sometimes our neighbors are not real nice, are they? Before you run out and rent a bulldozer, let’s draw our attention to the Word of God. I simply typed the word “neighbor” into my Bible study software and over 100 references popped up. Instead of listing them all, here are eight ways to deal with our neighbors.

1. If you’ve lent something to a neighbor and it has not been returned for seven years, release it by singing, “Let it Go.” (sorry about that). Deuteronomy 15:1-2: “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD’s release.” Actually, don’t wait seven years to let it go.
2. If you’ve borrowed something, return it quickly. Romans 13:8 says that we are to “owe nothing but love.”
3. If you are in conflict with a neighbor, work it out and don’t disclose all the dirty details to others. Proverbs 25:9: “When arguing with your neighbor, don’t betray another person’s secret.”
4. God hates it when we slander our neighbors according to Psalm 101:5: “I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors. I will not endure conceit and pride.”
5. If you have something your neighbor needs, give it to them right away. Proverbs 3:28: “Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you.”
6. Be a close neighbor to someone who has far away family members. Proverbs 27:10: “Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”
7. Look for ways to please your neighbor. Romans 15:2: “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”
8. Help your neighbor any way you can. Isaiah 41:6 says, “Everyone helped his neighbor, and said to his brother, ‘Be of good courage!’”

Sunday Night Neighboring Ideas

Since we’re not having Sunday night services this summer, we’re encouraging everyone to take these nights to specifically and intentionally work on neighboring. The staff put together some ideas that may work for you. These are printed on the green cards on the table in the lobby.

Begin praying, “God, how can I show love to my neighbors?” Introduce yourself to a neighbor you haven’t met yet Bring a plate of cookies to a neighbor Offer to share tools or lawn equipment Ask a neighbor for home improvement advice Schedule a date to have a neighbor over for a BBQ Hang out in front of your house or apartment Offer to help a neighbor in need Follow-up when you hear about a need Ask a neighbor, “How can I pray for you?” Go to a Back Water Gamblers Water Ski Show with a neighbor (free) Have

a neighbor over for root beer floats Plan a neighborhood block party – we're going to have one on June 22nd.

Jesus then states: "There is no other commandment greater than these." It's interesting that though this man asked for the one greatest commandment, Jesus actually gave Him two. He did so because loving others is the practical outworking of loving God. If you think of the 10 commandments, loving God covers the first four and loving others takes care of the last six. In Matthew 22:40 Jesus says, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

These two commandments are complimentary and are therefore really one – you can't fulfill one without the other. In fact, after giving the second part, Jesus uses the singular word "commandment" to show that they are really impossible to separate. 1 John 4:20: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar..." 1 John 4:21 says, "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." We can't say that we love God if we're hatin' on our neighbor.

Here's the bottom line. We're called to obey the Great Commission in the gentle spirit of the Great Commandment. God doesn't want us to flounder spiritually but to live missionally. I heard David Platt say this week that we must stop living vacational lives. I would add that we must start living vocationally for Christ.

It's pretty easy to say that we love God; it's another matter to be walking in love. I like the honesty of one guy who said, "To love the world to me is no chore; my big trouble is the guy next door."

In Romans 13:9 Paul says that God's commands are "...summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" A bit of background is helpful here. There was a raging debate back then about whom a neighbor really was. They wanted to know who was in and who was out. The Jews typically interpreted "neighbor," as "one who is near," or a fellow Jew. The Pharisees tended to reject "ordinary people" while a smaller community at Qumran excluded everyone who was not part of their group.

The question is not "Who is my neighbor" but rather, "Am I being neighborly to everyone, even my enemies?" A neighbor is anyone in need who God brings in front of me. To ask "Who is my neighbor?" is to look for a loophole by focusing on what claim others have on my time and energy and resources. To ask, "Whose neighbor am I?" is to focus on what I owe to the suffering people all around me. A neighbor is anyone in need that God brings in front of me.

It would be a good idea for us to begin praying something like this: "Oh, God, don't allow me to come into contact with anyone in need and leave him or her no better off than they were before I met them."

We've been learning that our neighbors also include the nations of people that God is bringing to the Quad Cities. Leviticus 19:33-34:

"And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

Through the partnership of several evangelical churches in the QCA, over a quarter of a million dollars was raised to refurbish the building for Calvary International Revival Church. Because of your generosity through our Next Door Nations emphasis, over \$70,000 was raised by Edgewood. The deacons have also voted to give \$200/month to Calvary for the next two years to help them with their ministry expenses. Pat Wulgaert and his team has done such a great job. There's still a little bit of work that needs to be done like grading some dirt piles and pouring some concrete.

I've been pleased to see a group of Edgewood women reach out the CIRC women by teaching them how to make pancakes. A week ago 14 of us attended the 15- year-anniversary of World Relief. And two weeks ago, Pastor Ed's ABF class invited a refugee from Burma named Margaret. His class has since met her son and three grandchildren at the airport and helped to furnish an apartment for them.

Some time ago I read a book called, "The Art of Neighboring" with this subtitle: "Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door." Here's what I wrote down after reading it: "Many of us have hundreds of online "friends," but do we know our neighbors? But what if Jesus meant that we should love our actual neighbors, the people who live near to us? Wouldn't it be great if we could mobilize our people to intentionally obey the second half of the Great Commandment? Imagine how our community would change! Imagine how Edgewood would change as families and individuals are won to Christ and begin worshipping with us! It would be incredible if God would launch a neighboring movement right here in the Quad City area!"

There's a lot of neat neighboring that goes on through the people of Edgewood. I'd like you to hear from a couple that are excelling at the Art of Neighboring.

→ Mike and Joan Ferguson Interview

1. Mike, you first met Derrick at work, right? Tell us how he became your neighbor. 2. Joan, tell us about some of the ways you and

Mike started “neighboring” with Derrick. 3. Mike, how did you first invite Derrick to church? Did he come right away? Did he keep coming? 4. Joan, did you follow a script or game plan for how to love Derrick? 5. Derrick, what stands out as you reflect on the kind of neighbors Mike and Joan have been to you? 6. Can each of you share one idea that can help the rest of us to love our neighbors?

In his book, *Discover Your Mission Now*, Dave Ferguson recounts reading a doctoral thesis entitled, “Blessers versus Converters.” The researcher looked at two teams of short-term missionaries to Thailand with distinctly different Missional strategies.

The team referred to as the “blessers” went with the intention of simply blessing people in practical ways. On the other hand, the “converters” went with the sole intention of converting people. Here’s a summary of the findings: The “blessers” had a greater impact than the “converters,” with 50 times as many conversions as the “converters.” Friends, let’s bless those who are in a mess. Let’s love the lost and meet the needs of our neighbors. Instead of blasting or bulldozing, let’s start blessing.

Ten Little Christians

We need to get back on task by owning the mission we’ve been given.

Ten little Christians, standing in a line, one disliked the preacher, then there were nine. Nine little Christians stayed up very late, one slept in on Sunday, then there were eight. Eight little Christians on their way to heaven, one took his own road, then there were seven. Seven little Christians chirping like some chicks, one disliked the song leader, then there were six. Six little Christians seemed very much alive, but one lost his interest, then there were five. Five little Christians pulling for heaven’s shore, but one stopped to rest, then there were four. Four little Christians, busy as a bee, one got her feelings hurt, then there were three. Three little Christians knew not what to do, one couldn’t forgive another, then there were two. Two little Christians, our rhyme is nearly done, quarreled over petty stuff, then there was only one. One little Christian, can’t do much ‘tis true; brought his friend to church – then there were two. Two earnest Christians, each won one more, that doubled the number, then there were four. Four sincere Christians worked early and worked late, each won another, then there were eight.

Eight missional Christians, if they doubled as before, in just a few short weeks, we’d have 1,024.

Close But Far Away

Let’s go back to the encounter this man had with Jesus. In verse 32, he responds to Jesus: “...Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.” It’s a bit comical that this guy is telling Jesus that He’s right, isn’t it? Of course He is! It’s like he’s saying that he and Jesus are on the same page.

The man then adds that “to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” He knew his Bible for he is making an allusion to 1 Samuel 15:22: “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

Jesus then responds to the man in verse 34: “ Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’” Did you catch that? He was close, but not in the kingdom. He was good, but not good enough. He was not far from, and yet he was far away. He was on his way but had not yet received Jesus as the only way.

The phrase, “not far” is emphatic in the Greek, meaning that Jesus wanted him to see that there was still separation between them, but he was close. He was religious, but did not yet have a saving relationship with the Savior.

It’s possible to have a church background and not be a Christian. You can know the truth and be lost in your sins. You could have heard the gospel your whole life and still be resting in your own good works. You could be sitting in a pew each week and yet be hardened to the gospel. You could be an inch from heaven and die and still go to Hell.

I love how this encounter ends: “But after that no one dared question Him.” This is a double negative, meaning that absolutely no one, not even one dared to ask any more questions. Why is that? Because some of us don’t really want to hear the answers that Jesus gives. And yet, I wonder if some of you are not far from the kingdom right now? Could it be that today, right now, is the day that you enter the kingdom of God?

Turn from how you’ve been living. Repent of your loveless life. Recognize that through the death of Jesus, all your sins have been paid for...if you will receive Him as your Lord and Savior.

God’s love does not run dry...I’m falling on my knees offering all of me; Jesus, you’re all this heart is living for. I’m hungry for you.

Invitation: “Hungry”

Mark 15:37-39

The Case For Christ: His Death

I was on the wrestling team in High School. The wrestlers and the basketball players didn't get along very well. We practiced on the gym stage while the wimpy round-ball guys ran around in the gym. There was a big stage curtain that we always pulled shut so we wouldn't have to look at our rivals. We used to really enjoy it when a basketball would slip under this thick curtain and bounce on one of our mats. We had a routine whenever this would happen. We'd give the ball to Guy Duffy, who wrestled heavyweight, and waited for one of the basketball guys to jump up on the stage to retrieve the ball.

When "Basketball Jones" would poke his head under the curtain and crawl up on the stage, one of us would tackle him and the rest of us would pile on. When we were done tenderizing him we'd roll him off the stage and then throw the ball out after him. As the season went on, I think they wished this curtain could have been a brick wall!

Do you ever feel like there's a brick wall between you and God? Does He seem far away and distant? As you read through the Old Testament, you can't help but recognize that God is holy, majestic, and separated from His people. There's a definite doctrine of divine distance. Close contact with the Holy God of the universe was formal, and somewhat limited. A clear line of separation was drawn between what was sacred and what was profane. When God spoke to Moses, He told him in Exodus 19:21: "Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish."

Jesus came to bridge this gap by making God near and accessible. This morning we're going to focus on three short verses from the Gospel of Mark. Please turn to Mark 15:37-39: "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God.'"

In this brief passage, we see three truths:

- The Victory Has Been Won
- The Way is Now Open
- The Offer Still Stands

The Victory Has Been Won

Verse 37 tells us that Jesus let out a shout right before He died: "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last." When Jesus died he didn't whimper or whisper. The phrase "loud cry" can be translated, "a big, or exceedingly great voice." His final words were a roar of victory. He died knowing that His work was complete. The price had been paid. The sacrifice had been accepted.

John 19:30 tells us that this shout contained the words, "It is finished." That means that all of our moral mess-ups and our total sin debt has been canceled.

When you think about it, it's amazing that Jesus was able to give a loud cry right before He died because victims of crucifixion usually had no strength left, especially when they were close to death. I came across a medical summary of what happens to the human body when it is crucified. Let me read part of it to you:

The cross is placed on the ground and the exhausted man is quickly thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood. The soldier drives a heavy, square wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flex and movement. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees flexed. The cross is then lifted into place.

As the man slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms and explodes in the brain. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet.

As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. Carbon dioxide builds up in his system.

Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins: a deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

It is now almost over--the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level--the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues--the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. (Adapted from C. Truman Davis, M.D. in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8)

Jesus can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues...and yet He still gives a victory chant. It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!

The Way is Now Open

The first truth we discover is that the Victory Has Been Won. Let's look now at verse 38 where we learn that the Way is Now Open. This verse is packed with meaning! Let's read it: "The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."

Several items in Israel's worship system spelled out the remoteness of God. In particular, in the Jewish temple there were curtains to keep people separated from God's presence. And, there were scores of rules and regulations.

In the New Testament, when you read of the Temple, the writers are most likely referring to the one that Herod built, or was in the process of building. Nothing remains of this worship center that was destroyed in 70 A.D. except some broken pieces of rock and some other fragments. This temple had replaced the one constructed under Zerubbabel in the book of Haggai, which had replaced the one built by Solomon in the book of 1 Kings.

The temple is where people used to go to pray and offer animal sacrifices to God. People would head to the temple at different times of the year, especially during the big celebrations like Passover, which generally took place during the month of April. This year, Passover begins today.

One curtain was located between the temple itself and the outer courtyard. While non-believers were welcome to be out on the patio, Gentiles were forbidden to go into the temple building. This area, which was paved with marble, was where the merchants and moneychangers had set up their tables. As we learned last week, Jesus dispersed those who were standing in the way of prayer and worship. Here's a picture of what the Temple looked like:

As you make your way closer to the building itself, you would come face-to-face with another barrier. Prominently displayed right next to a big curtain was a "Keep Out" sign that kept people from going where they weren't supposed to go. A fragment was discovered in 1871. This is a picture of what it looked like:

Here's the translation, "No outsider shall enter the protective enclosure around the sanctuary. And whoever is caught will only have himself to blame for the ensuing death." This curtain was designed to keep certain people out – I wish we could have had one of these plaques for the basketball team when I was in high school! The whole structure and religious system emphasized the remoteness of God and the difficulty of gaining access to Him.

As you make your way past this curtain (if you were allowed to), and into the Temple, you would see the Court of Women, the Court of Israel and a section called the "Holy Place" where sacrifices were made.

There was another part of the building called the "Most Holy Place." It's the tallest part of the temple. Let's take a look at this picture again:

The "Most Holy Place" was off-limits to everyone, except the High Priest. There was another curtain here, which was also called the "shielding curtain" in Exodus 39:34 because it was designed to keep people away. The High Priest could only enter once a year on the Day of Atonement to make sacrifice for the sins of the people. This was a scary thing for the priest because this was where God dwelt. It was a holy place. A rope was tied around his ankle just in case he died while he was in there so someone could pull him out.

The New Testament book of Hebrews provides some important insight. Please turn to Hebrews 9:1-3, 6-7: "Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lamp stand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place...the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only

once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.”

The curtain that separated all the people and the priests from going into the presence of God was blue, purple, and scarlet and was made out of yarn and fine linen. It was 60 feet long, 30 feet high and was about two inches thick. It took 300 priests just to install it. This was a piece of lasting tapestry that was designed to withstand all strains, tears, and rips. It was even bigger than our new church sign!

When Jesus died, this indestructible curtain, that separated people from God, was torn in two -- from top to bottom. The word “top” can also mean “from above,” which helps us see that God did it. Now, instead of just one person having access to the Almighty once a year, the way to God stands wide open to everyone, on every day of the year – 24/7.

The result is that we now have unlimited access to God. Everything has been paid in full -- we have been declared free and forgiven. And, we now have an open avenue to God -- we can contact Him at any time. Friends, all this is possible through the death of Christ!

Think with me about the timing of Jesus’ death. While Jesus is on the Cross, a multitude of priests are in the Temple getting ready to make the normal evening sacrifice. Since this was the Passover, there was a heightened awareness and a sense of awe as the Passover Lamb was about to be sacrificed. The Bible tells us that Jesus died at precisely 3:00 p.m. on Friday. Friends, this was the exact time that the priests would have been making the evening sacrifice!

Isn’t that cool? Jesus, who is the ultimate and final sacrifice, died at the precise time of the regular temple sacrifice. And, when He died, the thick and heavy curtain was torn in two, beginning at the top and splitting all the way to the bottom. Can you imagine what must have been going through the minds of the priests?

They weren’t supposed to even look at the Holy of Holies and now it was right in front of them. Did they run out? Did they cover their eyes? Did they drop to their knees and wait to be consumed by God’s righteous wrath? Did the Passover Lamb jump off the altar and scamper to freedom that day because the true Lamb of God had taken his place – and ours?

The symbolism is profound. Let’s look again at the book of Hebrews to better understand what Jesus did for us. First, let me read Hebrews 9:12: “He [Jesus] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.” Through the blood of Jesus, our sins have been paid and we can now experience forgiveness and eternal life.

Because of what Jesus did for us, Hebrews 10:19-22 tells us that we can now come right into the very presence of the Holy God: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.”

Friend, we can come boldly into His presence! Once a year, the high priest solemnly lifted a corner of the curtain and entered in with fear and trepidation. Now, because of what Jesus did, you and I can enter and draw near with confidence – if we come through Jesus.

The tearing of the curtain means at least three things.

1. God is revealed. Jesus came to let us know who God is. John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” The veil of secrecy is now lifted and God’s glory is manifested to everyone who puts faith in Jesus.

2. The barrier has been broken. The doctrine of divine distance has been replaced by the ordinance of open access! Through Christ, everyone has a direct line to a gracious God, who sent His Son to die as our sin substitute. Even Gentiles, who were barred admission to the temple, can now enter into the Holy of Holies.

3. The old order has ended. The curtain was not just opened, but ripped in two, indicating its total destruction. The Temple and its sacrificial system is no longer needed. Jesus was raised from the dead and the temple was razed a few decades later. That reminds me of Mark 13:1-2: “As He was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’” Jesus replied, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be

thrown down.”

The Offer Still Stands

The Victory Has Been Won and the Way is Now Open. That leads to the final point from this passage: The Offer Still Stands. We see this in verse 39: “And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God.’”

A centurion normally had one hundred men under his command. But they were also given special jobs to do. On this day, he was in charge of a smaller detachment that had crucifixion duty. He witnessed the scourging, the mocking, the spitting, the nailing, and he heard the last shout of Jesus. When he watched how Jesus died, willingly and powerless, and yet filled with power, he confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. He was deeply moved and drawn to the Savior.

Calvin Miller, in his book called, “Once Upon a Tree,” writes this: “God succeeded in validating Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God. Standing near the cross was a soldier, whose daring whisper of truth was heard above the clamor of unbelieving slander. He was impressed with Jesus’ meekness. He marveled at the calm even on the timbers of death...Life—real life—always begins for us on the dark side of Calvary when we encounter the cross and affirm the centurion’s statement of faith. Surely, Jesus was the Son of God...Jesus was not delusional when He claimed to be the Son of God, but we are deluded if we claim to believe anything else.” (Page 57)

There were other people near the cross that dreadful day but this professional pagan soldier believed and confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. Luke 23:48 tells us what happened when others saw how Jesus died: “When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and walked away.”

When someone beat their breast in the first century, it was a sign of guilt and remorse. Their indifference had been replaced with feelings of guilt. As they watched what Jesus went through, maybe they began to realize their role in putting Him on the cross. They came to witness a show, but they left with feelings of woe. The centurion believed when he saw what Jesus went through. The others said, “Let’s leave.”

What about you? Are you going to believe or are you going to leave? The offer still stands today. The victory has been won and the way is now open. But nothing is automatic. You must respond to the offer if you want the results of His death applied to your account.

Life Lessons

I see at least two life lessons from this passage that we can apply to our lives today. Application # 1 is for those of you who are already Christ-followers. The second action step is for those of you who are still in process on your spiritual journey.

1. Go to God with your concerns. Because of what Jesus did, we don’t have to be timid when we approach Him. We can come to Him anytime and anywhere for any reason! Brothers and sisters, don’t hold back! If you’re in need of grace or mercy, run into the awesome presence of God! Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

2. Go to Jesus for salvation. The centurion had a significant role in putting Jesus to death and yet he made a confession of faith when he took a closer look at what he had done. Likewise, you and I had a part in putting Jesus to death. Our sins are what nailed Him to the cross. And, just as this soldier was able to come to faith, even after doing something so reprehensible, so too, you can be saved as well. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done or how you’ve been living.

Perhaps you feel like there’s a brick wall between you and God this morning. Can I give you some good news? The barrier has been broken! The curtain has been cut! A bridge has been made. The victory has been won. The way is now open. And the offer still stands. You don’t have to find a way under the curtain or look for a hole in it somewhere. It’s been torn completely in two. The entrance is wide enough for the worst of sinners.

The Bible says that when you decide to put your faith in Christ, just like the centurion did, the wall of separation will come tumbling down. Listen to 2 Corinthians 3:16: “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

What are you going to do? Will you turn to the Lord right now? Will you move closer to the cross, or will you walk away? Are you going to believe, or are you going to leave?

I want to close this morning with something that was written by John Newton. He's the guy who wrote "Amazing Grace." He was known as the "Great Blasphemer." He had a reputation for profanity, coarseness, and wild living. And then he discovered God's amazing grace as he responded to God's offer. These words reflect what may have been going through the Centurion's mind that dark Friday afternoon:

In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight,
And stopp'd my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a Tree
In agonies and blood,
Who fix'd His languid eyes on me.
As near His Cross I stood.

Sure never till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look:
It seem'd to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke:

My conscience felt and own'd the guilt,
And plunged me in despair:
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And help'd to nail Him there.

Alas! I know not what I did!
But now my tears are vain:
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord have slain!

A second look He gave, which said,
"I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou may'st live."

Thus, while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.

With pleasing grief, and mournful joy,
My spirit now if fill'd
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live by Him I kill'd!