

Jeremiah 29, that's where we're going to be. Here's what I want to do this morning. I just want to paint a picture of the vision of what this Denton campus is going to be all about. And it's going to be the same heart, the same focus and the same mind as the Highland Village campus. In fact, we just say the Village around here. Anytime we say the Village Denton is when you're talking to someone from Highland Village or who are not from Denton. So it's going to be the same heart and same mind but with a specific contextualized version of the Village. What I mean by that is we have a specific strategic opportunity in the city of Denton that we don't have in the suburb of Highland Village. And so as best I can, I want to paint a picture of where we're going to go the next 40 years. And in that specifically, I want to paint a picture of how we're going to do that in the next 90 days, how we're going to start working towards that goal. And I think Jeremiah 29, a very popular Scripture, is going to be very instrumental, not only in our church for the future but for the church of God in America as a whole. And so I'm really excited this morning.

Now let me give you a little context before we jump into it. Jeremiah is writing to the Jewish people. The Babylonians have begun to conquer the known world, and they're taking the people they conquer, making them be exiles and bringing them back to Babylon. That's happened to the Jewish people. The Babylonians came in to Jerusalem, they conquered the city, they've conquered the people and now the people are exiles. And so Jeremiah, the great prophet, the one who lends his ear to the voice of God and speaks it to the people, is writing them a letter, and that's what we're about to read. Let's pick it up in verse 4, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:..." So even there you see the providence of God. God is behind this. Nebuchadnezzar is doing these things, but God says, "I sent you. I'm the One who exiled you." Which is just a weird thought, but He explains it. He says, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile." That word "welfare" is the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means "peace." I know to you and me, peace means a good feeling or circumstances, but it's a very, very rich Hebrew word that actually means flourishing in every single aspect of life: physical, spiritual, mental, emotional. It's human flourishing in every aspect of life. So when He says "Seek the *shalom* of the city," He's not saying, "Go try to make it feel good when you're in the city." No, He's saying, "I want you to seek the flourish of the city of Babylon." And if you know anything about Babylon, that's an amazing statement for God to make. "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD." Basically if you read the previous chapter, there are these false prophets that are saying basically the opposite thing that Jeremiah just said. They're saying, "Stay out of Babylon. Don't go into Babylon. God's going to heal us. God's going to restore our city. God's going to conquer Babylon, so don't go into Babylon. Stay separate. You don't want to go into Babylon. They're dirty, they're perverse. It's a city of sin. You just don't want to go there." And God, through Jeremiah, is going, "Hey, don't listen to those people. They're not My prophets. You go into the city, you live, you seek the welfare of the city. Don't listen to them." Let's keep reading. Verse 10, "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will

restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." And so basically you've got Jeremiah writing to a group of exiles, to a community of God's people much like us. And what I mean by that is you and I live in a fragmented society. I really don't think I have to defend that much, but isn't it weird that every single liberal thinks that the country is being taken over by conservatives? And at the same time, every single conservative thinks that the country is being taken over by liberals. How can that be? It doesn't make sense, but we really believe that. We live in a fragmented society. We live in a unified society. And I'm not talking about the city of Denton specifically. All you have to do is go stand at the courthouse to understand that. What's east of the courthouse? Something different than what's north. Demographically, what's in the suburbs? What's farther out? We live in a fragmented society. And Jeremiah is writing to these people who are exiles in the city of Babylon. Do you know who else is in Babylon? All the other exiles from other countries that have been conquered by Babylon. So He's writing to these people and saying, "Hey, let me tell you how to live as the people of God in a fragmented society. Let me tell you how to do this."

And the answer is astounding, because typically there's really two forces fighting against the people of God trying to persuade them of what to do. One of the forces is the Babylonians themselves. They're trying to tell the people of God how to live and function as the Jewish people of God within Babylon. And Babylonians were very smart. Even Post-Modern theorists today say there's three strategies you can take in trying to conquer people and get them to come into your society and make them live and function and not cause trouble. One is that you can just make them do it. If you conquer people and go, "Hey, you're going to do what we want you to do. This is how you're going to live. We're going to force you to live this way." What happens with that? That doesn't go over so well. I'll use the corny cliché, "It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog." If you get these people who are fighting for their ethnic and cultural survival, their very identity, they will fight. All you have to do is watch the history of Israel. The Babylonians knew that that doesn't really go well. Another thing you can try to do is just kick them out, but that doesn't ever go well either. You kick them out and they're eventually going to go gather up the horses again and come back in stronger. But the last thing that they knew they could do, and what makes the Babylonians so brilliant, is they could assimilate them. They could say, "Hey, come into our city and here's the deal. We're not going to kick you out, we're not going to force you to do what we want you to do. We'll give you all the jobs that you want. We'll let you have the highest seats of authority in our society. But to do so you have to become like us." And eventually what you would see is people were going, "Okay." You had selfish people who wanted prestige, who want power, whose pride wants them to be something important. They would come into the city and go, "That sounds good. It's better than getting kicked out. It's better than getting subjugated as a slave. If you read the book of Daniel, they gave him a Babylonian name, Belthashazzar. They gave him a Babylonian education. What are they trying to do? They're trying to assimilate him into their culture so that they would lose their identity. So eventually the people of God would lose their identity by entering the culture and being the exact same way. And God goes, "Listen, this is what the Babylonians are trying to do, but when you go into the city do not decrease. Don't decrease; increase. Don't just function like the rest of society. Don't assimilate; increase. Keep your identity, but seek the good of your city." But the Babylonians were trying to get them to assimilate, so God is speaking to that.

And the second group of people, the prophets we already talked about, they're trying to get the people of God by saying, "Hey, just don't go to the city. Just stay away from the city. Because if you go, you're going to get infected by sin. If you shake hands with one of them, surely you're going to catch what they've got. Don't go. Just stay away." And God says, "I don't want you to do that either." So you've got these two methods that God is speaking to. One of them is complete assimilation and becoming like the culture, and the other one is just complete segregation and letting the culture sit on its own, wallow in their own sin and not really care. Just go into the city to work to make money, basically use the city, but then you go out and have your little holy huddle outside of town and just be the people of God away from the city. God says, "I don't want you to do that either." And so what God is saying is profound. He's saying, "I want you to go in the

city but not be of the city. Here's how you be My people in a society that's fragmented, in a society that's relativistic, that doesn't care about spirituality, that doesn't care about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You go into the city, but don't be of the city." And that is profound.

A guy named Augustine who was a monk in Africa takes this idea and weaves a theology from it, and he wrote a book called City of God. His thesis of his book is basically that there are two cities portrayed in Scripture and throughout all of history. One is the city of God, this is God's people. There's a community of people, a city of people that act like God, try to be like God, love God, worship God, take care of each other, work for peace. That's the city of God. And if you look through Scripture, the city of God is represented by Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem, the church. And then he takes the whole other city and traces it all the way through the Scriptures. It can be Nineveh, it can be Babylon, it can be Rome. And he says this is the city of man. And the city of man is the city you would expect. They're godless, they don't love God, they don't worship God...at least not one god that they can all agree on. And so it's just mayhem. It's the United States of America as we know it...maybe not in the Bible Belt, but it's going to be here in about 10 years. It's just a fractured, fragmented society. And Augustine says, "You know what God asks us to do? He asks us to be the city of God within the city of man and to love on the city of man and seek its good." And this isn't just a Jeremiah problem. All throughout history, the church has struggled with this problem, this tension of "How do we do that?" Because we're going to be in the city of man. We can't help that. There's sin all around here in Denton. I mean, come into Denton, it's not Bible Belt. Denton's a blue city in the middle of a red state. So what's the answer? Are we all going to move out to the suburbs? And there's nothing wrong with the suburbs, but are we just going to abandon the city, which the church has done historically? What are we going to do?

And the reformers dealt with this same question. Let me read you a couple quotes that I think are just amazing. And let me be honest, this is all I've been reading about the last six months in my personal time. So a lot of these ideas are not mine, but they come from Augustine, they come from James Montgomery Boyce, Michael Horton, Dr. Tim Keller, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler. These are things that I have gathered. None of this is original this morning, but it's just so profound that we have to hear it. Michael Horton says, "The reformers avoided two tendencies: on the one hand, to confuse the two kingdoms (Rome and the kingdom of God) and, on the other hand, to divorce the two kingdoms and reject any Christian involvement in the kingdom of culture." And so there it is. They avoided the two tendencies. One was to confuse them and assimilate them, and the other was to completely segregate and leave the city of man all by itself. "Instead, they insisted that Christians should be involved in the world. They should neither seek to escape it, like the monks, whose lives were often more "worldly" than the world, nor seek to rule it, like the popes, whose own houses were not quite in order." There it is again. They should seek to neither escape it and segregate from it or assimilate it and have all its power like the popes of their time. "Every believer is a "priest" before God, and each person (believer and unbeliever) has been given a vocation or calling, by virtue of creation, to participate in some way in culture. We are social beings, created to enjoy each other's company, whether Christian or non-Christian. Redemption does not change our participation in culture, rather, it changes us and therefore, the character of our involvement. Separation from the world is not physical, according to the reformers; rather it is a matter of divorcing our dependence on the things of this world: its vanity and rejection or perversion of things heavenly."

And James Montgomery Boyce says, "Christians are citizens of two kingdoms." That's just how we are. I don't care who you are this morning, if you're a Christian, if you love at the moment you became a Christian, Augustine would say you got dual citizenship. You got dual citizenship in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man, in which you already were. You have the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God, and they have responsibilities in each. Those responsibilities aren't quite on an equal plain. Christians are citizens of God's kingdom first, which means that they will enter the secular world as Christians and work for it's good as both Christians should and can." And so God goes, "Hey, you want to be and know how to live as exiles. And as my people and keep My identity as My people. But at the

same time be relevant. Relevant isn't even the right word. To be a powerful force for the Gospel of Jesus Christ seeing transformed lives that don't separate, that don't assimilate. Go be a city within a city."

And is this not, hundreds of years later, the exact same thing that Jesus Christ said? Matthew five. Sermon on the mount. Jesus is just kind of giving his manifesto of the spiritual life, if you will. And he looks at his disciples and says, "You are a city on a hill. Let your light shine before men so that they might glorify your father in heaven." And then later in John seventeen, even when he's praying for his disciples in the high priestly prayer. He says, "Hey, God, I'm not going to ask that you would take them out of the world but that You would leave them in it and protect them. Protect them so they don't assimilate, protect them so they don't segregate but, Lord, let them be in the world just not of it." And that's the vision. I mean, that's the vision. This isn't a Village distinctive – this is the church. If the church wants to remain potent in the society we live in we have to learn how to walk in that tension of being in the world and not of it, right? Of being the city of God within the city of man.

And so here's what I want to do: That's where we're going. I mean, that's forty years from now that we hope that maybe in a small way this church, this campus could be that in the middle of the city of Denton, where across the street we have 34,000 students, where we live in the worst neighborhood economically, educationally, in the city. Our church is here. We are in the middle of the city. There is no more strategic place that God could have put our campus – to be the city within the city – to walk in this tension, to learn how to do this. And so what I want to do the rest of the time together is so how are we going to do this? It sounds great, and maybe you theologically agree with me but how are we going to do this? And so I've got four things and then we're out of here. How are we going to do this?

One, prayer. I think, if you're a believer in here, most of us could agree prayer's important, right? I mean, if you don't let's chat later. I mean, if you don't think prayer is important there's a needed thing but there are at work real, powerful, demonic, unseen forces that you and I labor against. And that will labor against us until Christ comes back to be. They know that God's plan, God's mission is to be the city within the city. And so they are going to labor against that. And listen, we're not going to push this thing forward without prayer. I mean, you think we're going to come in here, we're gonna work, we can paint some walls and make the building look cool and that's gonna transform a city. That's gonna make us a city within a city. Absolutely not! We can have the best discipleship programs, we can have the best children's ministry, we can have the best everything but without prayer, I mean what do we think we're doing? In fact, I mean even if you think about how God did this campus, how He gave it to us, we asked Him. We fasted and we begged Him for it and we prayed and He set it in our laps. And now that we've got it we think we're just gonna be able to put our hands on it and do what we want? Absolutely not! I mean, I'm afraid to touch this place, honestly. I'm afraid to do anything around here. Not a bad fear, a good fear. I mean, to touch something as holy as revealing His will to us in giving us this facility? And so we're going to pray. That's how He gave it to us.

And so the next step. What are we going to do now? We're gonna ask Him what He wants us to do with what He gave us. And so starting in October we're, every Wednesday, we're just going to come in here for an hour and we're going to pray. We're going to pray, and we're going to seek the Lord, and we're going to learn how to pray, and we're going to learn how to press in, and we're going to learn how to hear His voice together because if we don't do that it's just our ideas. It's broken man's ideas on how to fix broken man and how to affect broken man. We don't need that. We need to hear God's voice. And honestly, I'm excited about this on Wednesdays because here's the deal: I know we have a lot of people here on Sunday mornings but I think the health of the church will largely depend on if we get together and pray. And to think that we can do this and we can have an awesome explosion in this city and we can be God's people and keep our identity and grow in it without praying and without doing anything else is really just prideful and a joke. And so we're going to come in here and we're going to be a praying campus. We're going to be a praying church. We're just going to come in here and labor and we're going to learn how to do it together. I'm not a good prayer. I'm just going to admit that. I don't

like to do it because I start praying and I start thinking about the grass or something. I don't know. I mean, it's just out of control. And so I started thinking about the grass and I started thinking about the dirt that I got on my shoes while I was in the grass. So I stated thinking about when I bought my shoes and I'm done. I'm done. I'm done; I'm absolutely done. And so this isn't something where I'm going, Hey, I know how to do this. I'm saying, We need to learn how to do this together. We need to learn how to hear God's voice as a community. It starts there and it ends there. Because if we hear his voice and we do what He says then that's all we're supposed to do, right? That's all we're supposed to do. And so we're going to pray.

The second thing is that we do around here are we're going to start doing around here is recovery. We're going to recover. Listen: You cannot give what you do not have. I mean, to try to be salt and light – to try to be in the world but not of it you have to get out of the world, right? And so we've got Recovery at the Village because we're not just going to send you guys out thinking, "Hey, I know you struggle with this, this is not right but hey, you can go do this." You can't! Listen, we're never going to be healed fully but to be working on our issues, to be knowing our issues will help us know how to engage culture and walk in that tension. And so Tuesday nights at seven o'clock starting in the first week of October we're going to have Recovery at The Village here. We're going to start a Step Study which is basically discipleship on steroids. And listen: I'm discipling a group of guys – we're all going through it. Why? Because we all need to be healed of some things before we can go out and try to be this and run out and just blazing enthusiasm and go, "Yeah! A city within a city! THAT'S ME!" No. You're going to assimilate because you still love the city more than you love God. And so for unbelievers, what that looks like is, I would encourage you to become a Christian this morning and join us. Just become a Christian. But for believers, what it looks like is you're going to have to continue to work through your trash. And it's not going to be easy and it's not going to be fun. It's going to be like me trying to pull out this big weed we have in our front yard, right? We just moved yesterday and I'm sitting there and I'm like, "Oh, this is cake. All I have to do is clip the deal and pull the roots out." And three hours later I'm sitting in a pile of dirt. I mean, I'm sitting. You know where you get to the point where you don't even care? I was sitting down with the saw sawing it because I'm too tired to stand up. I'm serious. And it's still there, man. And I was just thinking, this is us. Right? This is us. It's not going to be fast, it's not going to be pretty; it's going to be really dirty but if we ever want to do anything with the yard, if we're ever going to plant grass then we're going to have to get this thing by the roots and start to get it out of the way. I think for most of us that's why Christianity is so boring because you get caught in this cycle of sin and you never get to progress past it. And so you never get the adventure of living as Christ allowed you to live through the cross because you won't deal with your junk. You won't recover. And so unless we deal with what's in us and what's about us and what's keeping us from being what God wants us to be – I mean, we're never going to push forward as a community. We won't. We just won't do it. And so get in Recovery at the Village. Get in a home group and start confessing your junk, and not that confession makes it all better but it's a start. We've got to learn how to recover, we've got to learn how to fight sin before we can go out and try to fight darkness and other people. I mean, it's just ridiculous that we think we can do that. I mean you can't give what you don't have. And so that's the second way.

And so prayer, recovery, and then training and equipping. And here's what I mean by that: Everything we are going to do here is to train and equip you to be missionaries in our culture. Listen: Christendom in America is dead. The Bible Belt is dying in case you didn't notice. The times where you could just talk to someone and assume they're Christian, assume they know what you're talking about, it's done. And as soon the single people in the city get married and have kids, it's really done. We're about to be Europe. And in most places in the country, including downtown Denton – we already are. It's just these pockets of suburbs of Dallas and these places where there's still kind of a Christian culture – it's leaving. So it's not going to be good enough for everybody to just come in here and feel good about the cross and be exhorted to be better. We have to train you how to be missionaries. We have to train you how to do this. Because it's not as easy as going, "Hey, be a city within a city. See you later." No. You have to think through that. You've got to think through, "Well, can I engage in this? Can I do this? What does it mean for this? How do I do this?" Those are questions

that everything that we're about to start doing here is going to train you and equip you to do that. And we're going to do it through Sunday services. I mean, every sermon, every song... everything that we're doing here this morning is to train you to be missionaries because we are about to be, if you haven't noticed, we're about to be smack dab in the middle of Europe. And the next fifteen years, one third of the churches are going to die. Most of them are already dying and declining. Why? Because nobody knows how to be a missionary anymore. We don't know how to do it. We've trained people how to be good and that doesn't work when the Babylonians come in. That doesn't keep your identity. We have to be missionaries. And so every event that we do, whether it's film and theology, whether it's FM360 – training parents how to train their kids, whether it's Saturday seminars where we teach you how to read the Bible and know the Bible and contextualize the Bible. Everything that we're doing in the wing where your kids are and next generation – we're not just teaching them how to memorize the Bible, like so they'll know all the books so that when you talk to another parent you'll be like, "Oh, my kid knows where neh neh neh. I can sing the song." Anybody know that? We're not... We're training them from the very beginning about the Gospel. And we have the best, in my opinion that I've ever seen, the best preschool and children's and youth staff to do that.

I mean, you think it's hard for us. What do you think it's like for a teenager today? To try to be in the world but not of it? Impossible. And so we're training them how. We're not just telling them to be good and babysitting over there for you. Everything that we do is going to be about training and equipping you – to go out.

So we're going to pray. We're going to recover. We're going to be trained and equipped. And then the last thing, and I think this is where most of us want to get, but it's important that you hear me: We will not get here without doing the other three well. This is the part that looks sexy and sounds sexy and I'm going to read some quotes and you're going to get excited but if we don't do the things the we've already talked about we'll never get here. We will never get here.

The fourth thing is we're going to participate in our city. We're going to live in the city and seek it's peace. Why? Because we don't need anything from it because it's not a threat to us because we know we can be in it and not of it. And so now we can just love it. We don't have to send in waves of evangelists. We can just move in and be amongst it and love it. And I'm going to read you some quotes from a guy named Michael Horton. Says, "If we have not paid our dues by years of making positive contributions to culture, we simply do not have the cultural clout to pontificate about cultural crises." And basically what he's saying is, unless you start serving the city, they're not gonna listen to you. I mean, the days of going door to door and expecting people to listen to you because they have some sense of morality – it's over. You have to get in the city and just love it. Why? Because that's what God has asked you to do. Not so that you can save anybody as if you can. Not so that you can plant more tracks on their front door. Not so that you can... You're just going to be a part of it because that's what God's asked you to do. And if you ever want to have a voice in it, that's what you have to do. And part of the problem is we've got to get off the sidelines of culture. All we've been doing for fifty years is throwing rocks at culture and telling them what they're doing wrong. But we haven't been helping. We haven't been doing anything. We've just been throwing rocks at them and saying, "You're dumb. Come out here and be like us." How's that working? It's not. And Horton says that if you want to have any voice you have to participate, you have to get in it. And so we're going to do this and specifically let me tell you what this looks like: At least for right now only 57.9% of ninth graders make it to graduation at Denton High School. If you didn't know Denton High School is about three blocks that way. Four out of every ten kids do not graduate. Do you know what that means? Oh, they live impoverished for the rest of their life. And so there's this really cool secular organization called *Communities and Schools* who, what they do is they find those students that are at risk of graduating and they match up a tutor or a mentor. Every time I say tutor, I'm afraid somebody's gonna be scared that they have to know algebra. They match up a mentor with every single kid. And of those kids they match a mentor with, 98.5% of them graduate. I mean we're not talking about downtown inner city Dallas. We're talking about our neighborhood. I'm talking about across the street from my house 62% of the kids at Calhoun Middle School are in danger of not graduating already. We're going to participate. And I'll just tell

you. I've got a kid that I'm already mentoring that I've filled out my application, we're going to have training here at the church – at the campus October 14th because you have to fill out an application, you have to put it in... And if you want more information, I think there's some at the information desk on how to do this but our goal is... Every kid in our neighborhood – we can staff that from our church. We might not have a whole bunch of algebra teachers but we have man power. 98% of kids, an hour a week they graduate. Our neighborhood, four out of every ten won't. We can do something. We can participate. It's not even hard! It's just hanging out with a kid. For the next ninety days that's what we're starting. I mean, they already love us. I mean, I get e-mails almost daily from the *Community and Schools* director at Calhoun Middle School saying, "Thank you! You have no idea!" And she comes and she sets up her booth. She doesn't come to the service. She comes and sets up her booth she comes over and she stops by my house. They already love us because we're not trying to do anything overtly...

We're not loving them with an agenda. We're just loving them. We're just seeking the Shalom of the city, and you know what? They see it. And I think that's part of our problem is we really don't love the city. We know we're supposed to love the post-modern world but we don't like them. I mean, we just don't. We gazed down our nose at them and we tell them what we need to tell them because we're supposed to, but they know without a doubt that we don't love them. We don't love them – we despise them. And to be God's people we have to relearn how to love them. And I know that this sounds so out there, so idealistic. You know, I've never seen a church like that. Are you kidding me? We're supposed to do that? Well I want you to know, that's the way the early Christians lived. And this is an eyewitness account on a book called *The Rise of Christianity* by Rodney Stark. He's trying to figure out what happened. How did Christianity rise in the early days? Why did it explode like it did in the middle of a fragmented culture like it did, in the middle of persecution like it did. In an eyewitness account there were these plagues that would come through and just wipe out cities of people, right? They didn't have any medicine. They had snake charmers and different kinds of things. They would let blood and they would do all kinds of things but they didn't really have an answer, and this is an eyewitness account; the early church lived like this: "They participated and gave themselves up for the city's sake. The doctors were quite incapable of treating the disease that swept through. People became afraid to visit anyone, and as a result thousands of people died with no one to look after them. Indeed, there were many houses which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any attention. The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets. The catastrophe was so overwhelming that people became indifferent to every rule of morality. Many pushed sufferers away, even their own dearest, often throwing them into the roads before they were dead hoping to advert contagion."

I mean, if you live in the city during a time like this what do you do? If you're trying to assimilate, you get out because you don't want that. And if you're segregating you stay out. But if you're a city within a city this is what you do: "Most Christians, however, showed unbounded love and loyalty never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another, heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and many departed their life serenely happy. For they were affected by their neighbors, and they cheerfully accepted their pains. They lost their lives in this matter, and many elders and ministers did as well." And then Stark, at the end of this chapter, I mean he can't really say it in an overt way because he's a scholar but this is what he said; listen: "The consequences of all this is that pagans survivors faced greatly increased odds at conversion after they recovered because of their greatly increased attachment to Christians." You can talk about the understatement of the times. He had to. He's a scholar. You know what he's saying. Because they did, Christianity exploded because people, because Christians, people of God lived like this. Christianity exploded.

And so you can close your bibles and put them down for a minute. I just want you to think with me. I mean this is where we're trying to go, but specifically in the next 90 days this is how we're going to do it. I mean, I'm painting the big picture here that I'm trying to pant. This isn't one of those things where we're just going, "Hey, we need to do this" and then

leaving you on your own to figure it out. We're going to pray. We're going to recover. We're going to get trained and equipped, and then we're going to participate. And I think an even better example than that, a quote that I just read... I mean this is the incarnation of Jesus Christ to a T. And so as we take communion I just want you to think about the incarnation. I want you to think about what it meant for him to come down to humble himself. I mean to go from glory to humanity. I know some of us think humanity is a great thing; like we look in the mirror and we think we're awesome, but Scripture say that it was a humbling of Jesus to step down from his glory to be a human. But you know what? He didn't come to assimilate. He didn't come to be like us. And praise God he didn't stay in heaven and continue to pour down at us and say, "This is what you should do. This is what you should do. You're not doing it right. This is what you should do." He came down and he showed us. I mean are you hearing that this morning? Are you hearing what he did? He came down and he showed us. And he put on flesh, and he put on blood, and he walked with us, he talked with us, and he guided us, and he led us, and then he went into the city – the city of Jerusalem. And he was despised by us because he wouldn't assimilate. He wouldn't become like the Pharisees. He wouldn't become like the Sanhedrin. He wouldn't become like the rulers. And he was kicked out of the city and beaten and dragged and mocked all the way out of the city to a cross, and he died for us so that we could go into the city. So that we could be part of the city of God. He got kicked out and banished from it.

And so we remember this morning as we take communion. We remember. And so here's what I want to do. I just want to give you a little instruction. You're going to enter up communion whenever you feel led. I'm going to pray for you and you're going to sit there but you can exit to the right and then come up. If somebody's sitting in your row that makes that awkward, you can exit to the left – I mean, you guys are smart enough to figure that out. I want to just give you a little instruction. Come up and somebody will be up here holding. Come take a piece of bread you can dip it and you can take it back to your seat and you can pray with your wife and you can pray with your family and you can just sit there and meditate and confess before you come, but that's what we're going to do. And there are going to be people all up here and we're just going to remember together. We're going to remember together. And in remembering the Gospel we're going to ask Christ to change us and make us more like him. Because all these things that we just talked about – they're just him! He's the embodiment of all these things. And so that's what we celebrate. And if you're not a Christian in here this morning. If you're just kind of visiting and checking us out we're so glad that you're here. We love you. Please come back. We'd love to take you out to lunch. We'll find somebody to take you out to lunch, but this is a family deal, and so we'd ask you to not do this – this is really sacred to us when we do this. And so just watch. Just check it out. You may even offer up a prayer to God and say, "Hey. I mean if this is real help me believe."

Let me pray for you as we remember this morning. "Father, help us. Father, thank you that by the Spirit we've been led to the son who led us out of darkness and into light. And Lord we thank you that Jesus was kicked out of the city so that we could be allowed into Your city. We need you! Oh, we need you. These things are big, and they're hard. And God, everything we talked about so far is hard. Prayer is hard. Recover is hard. Training to be a missionary is hard. Participating in a culture that doesn't like You is hard. But we're so incredibly grateful this morning that Jesus, though having equality with You did not grasp on to that but he emptied himself and he did the hard things. And so we remember this morning. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."