

If you have your Bibles, let's go to Matthew 13. We're eventually going to get over to Luke 3 but first I want us to look at Matthew 13 because it's going to set us up pretty well for what John the Baptist is talking about. And just to let you know out of the gate so you can be prepared for it, some of this is difficult stuff but it's stuff we've got to look at and pay attention to because ultimately our joy is on the line and what I know about you, even though I may not know you, is that you're serious about your joy. Because everybody is. Now, if you study or read the gospels, in particular the active ministry of Christ, one of the things that you're going to see, one of the things that's tremendously consistent in the ministry of Jesus is crowds. Wherever Jesus is, there are large crowds that gather. In fact, even size of some of the crowds is supernatural. I don't know how logistically it happened. Probably one of the more popular stories is where Jesus takes a little kid's lunch. He doesn't snatch it, He doesn't take it but it's evident that the crowd's hungry, the little kid has a couple of fish, a couple loaves of bread and He takes that and He feeds what the Scriptures is 5,000 men. So most historians would say if there's 5,000 men, then there are probably around 20,000 men, women and children that had gathered to listen to Him preach and teach. So without any kind of service location, without any billboard out front, without any e-mail, without any kind of thing like that, 20,000 people gathered to listen to Jesus teach. And over and over and over again in the gospels, you're going to hear phrases like, "...and the whole city came out to hear Him...and the whole region came out to hear Him...and large crowds were gathering to hear Him." Wherever Jesus was, there was a massive crowd. On more than one occasion, that crowd became a mob. On more than one occasion, the crowd tried to overpower Him and force Him to be king. In fact, one of the examples of this would be where in the five days before Jesus was arrested, He comes into Jerusalem and the whole city comes out to meet Him and screams out "Hosanna, You're the king. Hosanna, You're the king" and they're throwing palm branches down in front of Him and the whole city is in love with this man. I mean, this is rock-star extraordinaire. He can't go anywhere where He's not being bothered by the paparazzi, He can't go out to eat. In fact on more than one occasion, the Scriptures say that He and the disciples were unable to eat. They couldn't even sit down and eat. On other occasions, the crowds got so big and so pressed into Him that they had to literally try to escape some way. This is a man who drew massive, massive, massive crowds. And of those crowds, on a whole there was a level of repentance and there was a confession of love for Christ. And we know at least in Jerusalem that the whole city comes out and says, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna. You're our king. We'll follow You. You're the one." There's this real apparent love for Jesus.

But here's where it gets a little peculiar. Despite the fact that tens of thousands of people somewhat repented and somewhat confessed love for Jesus, when all is said and done, there are 120 men and women in an upper room. So somehow tens of thousands of people disappear and only 120 are left. That's pretty peculiar, isn't it? In fact, it's always blown my mind that on Monday, the whole city comes out and says, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna..." and on very early Friday morning, that same crowd screams out "Crucify!" It's a really interesting animal. It's not surprising to Jesus. First, because He's God, but secondly, because He said it was coming. I mean, He said, "Hey listen. This is what the kingdom's going to be like when it hits." And so that's what I want to you what it's like. This is a very scary idea, but it's in there and I love you. So we've got to talk about it. Matthew 13, verse 1, "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him,..." See? I'm not lying to you. I'm not making that stuff up. "...great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down." So get the picture. He starts out teaching by sitting down on the beach, He's just kind of teaching, the crowd's growing pressed, He scoots back a bit and He's got two choices: walk on water or get back in the boat. He's like, "I'm going to save that walk on water thing for later," so He gets in the boat. "And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out

to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.” Nobody gets this story, not even His disciples. I mean literally, they all gather to hear Jesus and He’s like, “Let’s begin. There was a farmer who went out and just started throwing seed everywhere.” Alright, that’s not how you plant. “He threw his seed everywhere. Some got eaten by birds and some got choked by thorns. Amen. We’re dismissed.”

And so the disciples come up to Him right afterwards and they’re like, “Uh, this ain’t working. We don’t even understand it. And if we don’t understand it, who are your disciples, then the crowd doesn’t either.” So Jesus is going to come back and explain it. Pick it up in verse 18. “Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.” So here’s what He says. There are going to be men and women who hear the gospel, who hear the word of the kingdom, who hear about the grace and mercy of Christ and they don’t quite understand it. And instead of running down, instead of holding fast, instead of trying to get to the bottom of it, although it is intriguing although it does resonate with them, for whatever reason, they’re just going to walk away from it. And that thing that was at one time was resonating with their soul and intriguing just disappears. Let’s look at what happens next. “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” So this is a person, a man or a woman who hears the word of the kingdom of God, they hear the grace and mercy of Christ, they hear about the cross, they hear about these things and they buy it. I mean, they buy in and in an instant they’re like, “I’m in. I’m completely in.” And they start with a bang. Think Thursday night youth camp for you church folk. Think prolonged invitation. Think “Sing it again” until everybody is down front going, “I will never sin again” and then we dismiss and three or four weeks later, we’re right back where we were. Okay, that’s what happens, “Yes,” boom, they’re in, start out with a bang, in a few weeks it gets difficult and they’re out. And then there’s two more here. “As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” Let me just be real honest about this type of person. All this type of person does is say “Yes, I’ll follow Jesus, but it’s on my terms. I’ll follow Him, but here’s what it looks like.” And the funny thing is that Christ just doesn’t really play that game, ever. There’s pictures of how asinine this is everywhere. Like my two year old doesn’t set the rules in our house. He doesn’t get to tell me how things are. And in the same way, us saying to God, “I’ll take your salvation, but here’s what it looks like. You can have this area and this area and this area, but this, this is mine and I’m going to run it my way, this is mine and I’m going to run it my way and this is mine and I’m going to run it my way.” And basically, Jesus says that the word’s going to get choked out altogether. Then there’s one more type here. Verse 23, “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” The reason this text is difficult is because what I want to do is go, “I’ll take D, please.” I mean, I want the good soil, I want my life to be on the good soil and right now all I’ve got is today to be faithful. And I know some of you are like, “What? Are you saying that my pastor doesn’t have assurance?” No, I have absolute assurance right now, but let me promise you this. If a year from now I want nothing to do with Jesus, if a year from now I say everything I said and taught out of the word was a lie, then know this: I never really had Him to begin with, it was all about my pride, it was all about me and I never really had Jesus. Alright, so that makes me a little nervous. What if I’ve got no root?

And Luke 3 is going to make this whole idea worse. Because of the tough nature of some of this, I want us to start in verse 18 and then we’ll come back and pick it up in verse 3. “So with many other exhortations [John the Baptist] preached good news to the people.” Now, John the Baptist is going to say some very difficult things, and he’s not seeker-

sensitive. In no way is he going, "What if I offend people?" In fact, his intro is, "You brood of vipers..." So he's going to say some difficult things. What I want to do is, after we wade through what is very difficult things, I want to come back and tell you why it's such good news, why those difficult things are such good news. Let's pick it up in verse 3 now. "And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism..." Now, we're in sort of a quandary already because he's at the Jordan, preaching to the Jews but he's preaching that they need to be baptized but Jews didn't get baptized, only gentiles who wanted to become Jews did. So John the Baptist is attacking, right out of the gate, their Judaism, which isn't safe in the 1st century at the Jordan. "...proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" That's John's job. Jesus is going to come behind him, bringing with Him the kingdom and the gospel and here's what He's going to do. "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." So let me chat about this because it makes it sound like Jesus is going to make the whole world flat. But who wants a flat world? I don't. I like the mountains, I like the valleys. So let me try to explain and break down the code here. What's going to happen in Christ, what's going to happen in the cross, what's going to happen in the coming in force of the Holy Spirit is that the valleys or the low places are going to be lifted. So the base parts of the human soul, the wicked areas, the dark places, through Christ, are going to be brought up and healed. That's the good news. The high places, those are going to be brought low. Self-exaltation, self-pride, self-will, it's going to be absolutely blown to kingdom come. Because the coming of the gospel is this, "Throw yourselves on the free mercy of God. You cannot be saved by good work." So that blows up self-exaltation, doesn't it? Specifically for the 1st century Jew whose whole mindset is that "God loves me because of my heritage, my Jewishness and because I obey the law." So the coming of the gospel's going to blow up the high places. Self-exaltation, self-worth, it's going to blow it up because it's going to force you to throw yourself completely on the mercies of God. He's going to straighten out what is crooked. This is what you've always heard about the gospel. He's going to take those sinful areas of our heart, lust, rage, manipulation, lying... I think one of the weird parts of humanity is that we have these really crooked things about us that we don't even know. Like, have you ever lied when you didn't need to lie and you don't even know why you were lying? Have you ever made more out of yourself, maybe exaggerated a little bit? I mean, how weird is that? Like to lie to protect yourself is one thing. I'm not saying it's right, I'm just saying it's understandable. But just to lie and not even know why you're lying when there's no reason, that's a really strange part of the human soul. So one of the things Jesus is going to do is correct all the crooked ways in us. All the manipulation, all the lying, all of that, He's going to correct. And the last thing it says He's going to do is He's going to make smooth the rough places. And I think this has to do with more than just any obstacle that stands in the way of us seeing salvation. It's my belief that the majority of us lack depth in Christ not because of bad/wicked things but rather morally neutral things. And what I mean by that is things that the Scriptures wouldn't outright call sinful but we just have so much of them in our lives that we drown out the voice of God, drown out time to be with Him. So we just busy ourselves with morally neutral things, and then we think we're doing alright because we're not doing bad. And so Jesus is going to remove those things. And for those of you who have chased hard after Christ, it's an odd thing to have Christ engage you and say, "I want to remove this from your life" when there's nothing evil about it. He just wants it out. And the last thing it says is with the coming of Jesus, we're going to see salvation. Now this has been a pretty big deal to the Jews because the whole Old Testament points outside of itself of a coming salvation. So he's saying here, "Jesus is coming." So, you can see why large crowds are going to follow Jesus. I mean, if this is the promise, then I want those things. I want Christ to fill the base things in me. I mean, Chandlers for the last 150 years have been pretty wicked dudes. One of them got hung for robbing trains and it just gets worse after that. I want the base things out of me. I want the crooked paths made straight. I don't want to be a liar and a manipulator. I want obstacles removed so I can see salvation. I want those things.

So the question then is: How do we get them? And John's going to say how you don't get them. And then by default, we'll know how you do get them. And then we'll get into what I think is the difficult part. Here's John's sermon now. I

like his introduction “He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”” Now, calling a Jew in the 1st century a brood of vipers, I don’t know that we have an equivalent. The Jews completely embraced the creation story that you’ve heard about Eve being deceived by the serpent and therefore every difficulty, every hardship and every bit of wickedness in the world is due to the serpent’s deceit of Eve. And so he just called them sons of the devil. Who did he call sons of the devil? God’s chosen people who obey God’s law. They thought everyone else in the world was issue and they were the light. In fact, Abraham is told in Genesis 12 that the Jews were going to be the light by which the rest of the world came to know God. And so John the Baptist shows up and his intro to this very proud, very religious, very moral people was, “How are you doing, sons of the devil?” I mean, it’s a pretty gutsy intro there. Look at what he says next. “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” That’s a rhetorical question. Let me tell you what he’s saying there. He’s saying, “You’re out here listening to me because God is warning you. Think about it. These men and women, very proud, very religious, very moral have come out to the Jordan to listen to a man dressed in animal skin eating bugs calling them children of the devil. There’s got to be something supernatural in even that draw. And he’s saying, “Who warned you of the impending wrath?” He’s saying, “You came out here because God has started stirring in your soul that something is coming. And they had always believed in the divine blessing, that with the coming of the Messiah there was going to be blessing and there was going to be wrath. And so John the Baptist is saying, “Which one do you want?” Well, if you’ve ever had that choice, blessing or wrath, most people don’t go, “I’ll take the wrath please. Thank you. How is that packaged?.” So listen to what he says. Verse 8, “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.” Now, this next line is going to start letting us know what he’s saying here. “And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” It seems that the Jews here felt like they had God a little bit boxed in. And here’s why. God had promised them, and He’s going to keep His word, that He is going to use them to change the world, to be the gate though which salvation flows. And so they knew that God couldn’t wipe them all out. Because if God wiped them all out, then that wouldn’t occur and God’s promise would be broken and God can’t break His promises. So what they did was this kind of “Judaism just good enough.” And so they went, “Hey, I’m a Jew by heritage so God isn’t going to be able to destroy me. And what I’m going to do is do just enough law to be accepted by God.” And so, they went to the temple, they would have gone to the synagogue on Saturday, they would have been externally good, they obeyed the external laws in order to look clean against the backdrop of a pagan world. But we’re going to find out when Christ comes that their hearts, despite this fact, are nowhere near God. John the Baptist shows up and says, “Your heritage and your morality are inadequate for salvation. Your repentance has been a false repentance. Your love for God is a shallow love, therefore inadequate. And the axe is at the tree, and He’ll chop you down and burn you. And if you think that He can’t do this because of His Abrahamic promise, He’ll make that rock Abraham’s children. You don’t get to pigeon-hole God.” See what I mean by not seeker-sensitive? I mean he’s not walking out to a bunch of people who are stoned, drunk out of their minds with Metallica t-shirts on. That’s not what he just walked into. Not that there’s anything wrong with Metallica; that black album’s awesome. Now, he’s walking up to very devout, very religious men and women who morally went well beyond anything in the ancient world. And John the Baptist is tearing into them saying, “You think that your heritage, who your parents were, you think that your behavior, what you’ve morally accomplished by strength of will is going to be enough to save you, but I’m telling you God’s wrath is coming for such things.” He’s saying that there’s a true repentance and then there’s a false repentance, and the false repentance is inadequate. And so the crowd, rightfully so, is absolutely freaked out by this. But it resonates with them. It resonates because they start going, “What do we do then?” I mean, they run into the water and say, “Baptize me. I know Jews aren’t supposed to get baptized. I’ll get baptized. What do we do?” Now if you’re a thinker, here’s where the text gets really, really interesting because here’s what John the Baptist just said. John the Baptist just said that your works, your acts of service, your acts or morality, your list of things that you have morally done and not done, they’re not going to be enough to save you. And then they ask him, “What shall we do then?” And then he gives them a list of things to obey. Does that

sound a little loopy to anybody? "Look, a list of things isn't going to save you." "What will?" "Here's your list." I mean, it's a really interesting animal here, but there's something here.

And here's what it is. Over and over and over again in the New Testament there's two ideas that I'm going to put together for you of 1) bearing fruit and 2) self-examination. The Scriptures are going to say over and over and over again, especially Paul. Paul says that no man shall neglect the painful work of self-examination. In the book of Hebrews, I think that was written by Paul, some theologians say Luke, whoever it is, he says that we should all be nervous if we haven't entered into the Lord's rest. Be afraid if you have not entered into the Lord's rest. So this idea of bearing fruit and this idea of self-examination that leads me to this end. It seems then that what John is about to teach is an objective evidence of genuine repentance. So what he's about to say to these men and women, "Do this...do this...do this..." is not done for approval but rather is a result of throwing themselves on the free mercy of God. So let's read this and then I'll tell you why it's good news. Look at verse 10, "And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." So for the man or woman who has thrown themselves completely on the free mercy and grace of God, one of the transformations that occurs when we do that is we begin to see all that we have and all that we own and that we've been given in a very different light. Here's what this is saying. The man or woman who has completely thrown themselves on the grace and mercy of Christ is not someone who sees someone who is freezing to death and praises God that they have six jackets. They are not men and women who see the starving in the world and praise God that they have storehouses of food in their pantry. Now I'm not saying that there's not an overt, unbelievable gratitude for the gifts of Christ, but rather it becomes impossible when you throw yourselves on the free mercies of God to then look at the poor and the wounded and the starving and the cold and the hurting and go, "Praise God I'm not like them. Hasn't God been good to me that I'm not there." But instead that you give away your coat. You eat and you give away your food. Whether or not we have genuinely repented and thrown ourselves on the full mercy of God or whether we have a false, inadequate love for God is revealed here. How do you view your things? How do you view your stuff? How do you view your money? How do you view your food? So we can play the game. I mean, this is church, we can play it. We can learn the language, we can learn when to raise our hands and when not to, we can journal, we can read a bunch of Christian books. Or we can buy them, read the first chapter and then put them away. But we can do that and play the game or we can lay this on our lives and over our lives and go, "Have I thrown myself on the mercies of God?" Because one of the products of genuine repentance is giving away tunics and food. The funny thing is, through all of this, you're going to see him attack two things: possessions and sex. Because those two things are really base instincts that are problematic for our holiness.

So let's look at this next one. "Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." Another result, another objective evidence, another fruit of genuine repentance is that we don't use our power, we don't use our influence and we don't use our position to extort and to take, but rather to give. It's an interesting animal that he tells the common man "give" and he tells those who have positions and jobs that were historically wicked to "quit taking." He tells the one to give and the other to quit taking. So that's all there is in this text as far as objective evidences of genuine repentance goes, but there are many more in the New Testament. And John the Baptist also starts attacking Herod because Herod married his brother's wife, he was really a sexual deviant. Let me tell you the level of sexual deviancy he gets to. His wife who is his brother's wife, her little daughter came in and did a little belly dance for him on his birthday, which would be a little awkward wouldn't it? And then he gets so enthralled that he's like, "I will give you anything you want, girl." What does she want? John the Baptist's head on a platter. But come on, a sane man wouldn't cut off a man's head just because a half-naked chick asked him. But he cut off his head, put it on a platter and brought it to her. But here's the thing about sexuality, sexual deviance in particular. It will always take you deeper than you ever fathomed it would go. And some of you know exactly what I'm talking about because pornography in this venue

stopped being enough and so it carried on to this venue and that stopped being enough, and I'm telling you, it's going to end very, very dark. And I'm not saying you're going to cut off somebody's head but I am saying, it's going to end very, very dark. Which is why the Scriptures have so much to say concerning sex.

So why is this good news? Because if you think you're having a hard time hearing it, I had to study it for three weeks. To lay these objective evidences on our lives and go, "Have I genuinely repented or am I just playing a game for the Lord? Do I just kind of give Him lip service or do I really love the Lord? There are two reasons why the commands of God in Scripture are such good news. Let me tell you what the two of them are. These things enable us to see whether or not we're born of God. They enable us to see whether or not we really have thrown ourselves on the free mercy and grace of God. And here's why that's such good news. Let's say we lay that on our lives this morning. Let's say we lay that on our lives and go, "No, I don't do that, I don't see that way, I don't live that way," and it becomes apparent to us through self-examination that we haven't thrown ourselves on the free grace and mercy of God. Well then here's the good news in that. Now you know and you don't have to be confused by the churchism that gets thrown into the mix. And now we can throw ourselves on the free grace and mercy of God and ask for forgiveness and ask for help. It's why it's such good news. And here is the second reason why it's such good news. I've been fervent about this since I got here. Christianity, when I first started looking into it, it just sounded so threatening. Like "Do this or..." I mean, it's kind of a weird thing to be nine, ten years old and have your parents and other adults say things like, "Mommy and Daddy are going to be in heaven. Do you want to be in heaven with Mommy and Daddy? Or there's hell. What do you want?" "Heaven please." "Here's how you do that. Repeat after me..." Like, so much of it seemed threatening. "Do this or... Do this or... God doesn't like this. God doesn't like that." It just seemed like God was really angry, and not only angry but pretty much against anything that I thought was funny. Some of that's still true. But it wasn't until college... I went to a college that theologically leans toward the left. And I was grateful for that because it made me study. I think if I went to a place where I just agreed, I'd be like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah..." But because I was, "Wait a minute. That can't be right," I started studying. Here's one of the things I found just so saturated in Scripture that I couldn't believe I never heard before. The commands of God are about joy. God is not glorified in begrudging submission to rules, but rather by my joy in submitting to Him. And the illustration that I always use that illustrates this perfectly is marriage. Like, if you came to me and said, "Matt, how's your marriage to Lauren?," and I went, "Well, I gave my word, so I'm in. To be honest with you, I think that woman is horrible and she sucks the life out of me. But I made a promise. I made a promise to stay faithful and I'm a man of my word. So for the rest of my long, long life..." Is anyone going, "Oh, I want some of that. I want that for me. When I was a little girl/boy, I dreamed of just that, a commitment that was so strong that it can endure the most horrific of circumstances." But I'm telling you, that's what people have done with Christianity. That's the package. But in the Scriptures, Christ is going, "No, I'm not glorified by your begrudging submission. I'm glorified by your joy. And so, I'm trying to lead you to joy." And so the commands of God about wealth and stuff is not about God or the church trying to control your wealth or get your money, it's about your joy. Because God's most glorified in your enjoyment of Him. So listen, God's not sexually repressed. For the record, it was His idea. "Be fruitful and multiply." You know how that happens, right? Try to find anything more erotic than Song of Solomon, chapters 3 and 4. God's after your joy. So this is why there should be a ferocity towards obedience.

So here's what we've got to do this morning. I mean, you've got to do it. You can avoid it, but by avoiding it, you still play a part in the story. Because here's the truth: every one of us is in this story. And you've got a role to play here. You've got a part in the story, whether you like it or not. Rail against it all you want, but you've got a part in the story. And even if you're like, "Aw, forget it," all you've just proved is that you're the first type where the seed just went on the path. So how do we find out what part we are in the story? Well, it's self-examination, how you view your stuff, how you live your life, how you view your job, how you view your neighbor, how you spend your money. All of this has to be put over your life and you have to look at it because there are very deep, very eternal things at stake. And I know this is difficult and I know nobody wants to call you a sinner. Because God knows you can't grow a church and be validated as a preacher in

the Post-Modern world calling people sinners. But it's what we are. We're broken. And everybody knows it, they're just trying to use colorful language to describe it in new ways. Alright, so you've got to do it. That's the most frustrating part of my job. I can't do it for you. I can just examine my own life, I can just lay the Scriptures on my own heart, I can examine and go, "Is there fruit? Am I bearing fruit? Is there change? Can I see a growth in love, joy, peace, patience? Are the valleys coming up? Are the hills going down?" And where I've failed at those things, I run to the mercy of Christ, I beg for forgiveness, I ask the Holy Spirit for help and I get back up and go. So do you pass? That's what I'm asking. Do you pass? Will you pass the painful work of self-examination? Because John's message is "Repent, for the axe is laid against the tree." Turn, cling, lay yourself at the Lord's feet. Ask for mercy, ask for help, ask for forgiveness. There's movement when you throw yourself on the free mercy of God.

Let's pray. I want to be real clear about what we're talking about and what we're not talking about. I think the majority of preachers and teachers are introverts and cognitive. So I think what happens sometimes is we make Christianity about reading books and journaling and thinking. And I definitely think that's the path the Lord put some of us on, but some of us are not going to be big readers and we might never own a journal. And I think the Lord loves you too. Here's where it lands. Are we relying on heritage and good work for salvation or have we thrown ourselves on the free mercy and grace of Christ? If the answer is, "Man, I don't know," then there are objective evidences that help answer the question. And the good news is that if we'll do the painful work of examining our hearts, examining our lives, then we'll be able to see whether or not we do need to throw ourselves on that grace and mercy or whether we have. And listen, the valleys get filled up slowly and the mountains get whittled down over time. And it teaks the breadth of our lives for the crooked paths to be straightened out and those rough places to be made smooth. I think this is why we continue to work our our salvation with fear and trembling, why we continue to throw ourselves on the free grace and mercy of Christ. But for those who have genuinely repented and come to know Him, there's going to be growth, there's going to be progressive sanctification, there's going to be a loosening of the hands on the things of this world, there's going to be those things. And I don't think you can do it in a few minutes. I think it's going to take some time, a few days, maybe some weeks. "Jesus, I thank You for these men and women and I thank You for a chance to come and read what's a really difficult word and a hard word and not one that's making us leave here felling chipper. At least I hope not because there's a graveness to this and a seriousness to this. My prayer is for clarity, clarity of thought, clarity of belief, clarity of position. And my prayer is for joy, freedom and joy. Help. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."