

Let's go to Luke 4. We have tons to do. In fact, we are going to cover about two chapters. So as slow as I've worked the last four or five months, we'll do the opposite of that today. Last week, we looked at Jesus engaging the men and women of Israel, claiming to be the Messiah but saying that it's going to look different than they thought. And He comes in and says this isn't going to be an ethnic Jew thing. In fact, any kind of ethnocentric understanding of God is now over, it's dead. "I've come to save the Samaritan. I've come to save the Gentile. I've come to save the Jew. I've come as salvation for all, not just one ethnic group of people." And Jesus is going to show up and say, "And this isn't just for good people. I haven't come to bring salvation for those who have been able to obey the Torah or the Old Testament law, but rather there are going to be people who become believers in Me who have horrifically dark pasts. There are going to be people who become followers of Mine whose present reality is filled with struggle, maybe fear, maybe despair. So I haven't come for the good people; I've come for the broke people also." He says that this isn't going to just be about doing; this is going to be about being. "I've come for the heart, not just external, outward action." And then He's going to say, "I haven't come to start a political movement. This thing that I'm going to do, this transformation that's going to occur worldwide will not come through governments but rather through transformed lives within domains of society." And that's kind of what we covered last week. And then we looked at Jesus' claim that He had come to preach good news to the poor, that He had come to set the captives free, to bring liberty to the oppressed, to give sight to the blind and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And so we looked at that through the lenses of Jesus saying that salvation coming was going to look very different than the 1st century Jews thought it was going to come.

Now what I want to do now—and I know this is going to sound a little bit offensive right out of the gate—I want to see whether or not Jesus is a liar. I want to see whether or not He's a liar, and here's what I mean. It is one thing to say something; it is another thing to live out what you say. Is that correct? It's not going to be good enough for Jesus to say that He's come to do these things and then not do them. And so all we want to do is see if then, after this very good sermon, will Jesus, now that He's proclaimed the kingdom, now walk in it? Will He get distracted? Will He sell out? Will He, when given pressure by outside forces, recant and kind of step back? As people try to exalt Him, will He buy in a little bit? Will He really go after the really jacked up people or just those with a little bit of a personality disorder? What's He going to do? This is what we've got to see, because here's my hope tonight. If He lives out what He taught, then He can be trusted. If He doesn't, then we don't have to trust Him. So, let's see if He's a liar or not. And I really am hoping you're not on the edge of your seat. "Is He? If He is, then I have wasted a lot of my life."

So let's get going. We'll pick it up in Luke 4:31. He just finished His sermon. There was a potluck dinner, and then He goes down to Capernaum. Here we go. "And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Ha! 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.'" I have always loved this text because during the time that Jesus walks the earth, there's this massive amount of confusion about who He is. His family says at times He's crazy. You've got the Pharisees that are saying He's demon possessed. You've got His disciples who are unsure. And the only ones who consistently get it right in the New Testament are the demons. And that's what you just saw happen. "I know who you are—the Holy One of God." I always want to point out little things that are intrinsically within the text that it might not come out and say. Notice that there's no dualistic battle for the universe going on here. Jesus tells the demon to be quiet, and there's no more argument. This is not this kind of dualistic idea

of good vs. evil, and whoever plays their cards right and maps out their strategy right wins. Nothing evil ever argues with Jesus, ever. "Be quiet. Get in the pigs." And that's what you're going to see happening over and over and over. This man walks with an authority that, until the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, was unattainable. "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent and come out of him!' And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, 'What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!' And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region." So He walks into a room, begins to preach and teach in the synagogue, a man who is demon possessed...I do not consider myself an expert in spiritual warfare. There are such things as demons. There are such things as oppressive forces. Here comes a man, demon possessed, therefore would have been viewed by the religious ruling party as an unclean man, a man unworthy of the Torah, a man who is demon possessed because of his own vices, his own sin or that of his parents. And Jesus, with no judgment, simply goes, "Ah now, we'll set him free." Have we read anything lately about Jesus coming to set maybe oppressed, overwhelmed, beat up people free? So right out of the gate He's kinda doing what He said He would.

Oh, it will get better, friends. Look at verse 38. "And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ." There's a couple of things happening here that I need to unpack for us. We've talked about it historically, and we'll talk about it when He calls Levi the tax collector here in a second, but the prevailing view of the 1st century man or woman was that if you had an illness or a disease or a deformity, you fell into a class of people called "sinners." And there was great debate over what made you sick—your sin or the sin of your parents. So if you have any history of kind of reading the New Testament, specifically the Gospels, there's actually a story where it plays out just like this, where a man can't walk and the Pharisees ask Jesus, "Is this man crippled because of his sin or his parents' sin?" And so remember what we said last week, that Jesus came to set the oppressed free. And we said one of the things that that means is those who are oppressed by the law and oppressed by a prevailing religious arrogance were being set free by Christ. And that's what you've got happening here. You've got Him engaging people that would have been considered by the ruling religious elite as unclean, and yet Christ is healing them. He's making them clean. That's why you have the emphasis here on "unclean." There was an "unclean demon." Is that redundant? I mean, do you get in spiritual warfare and go, "Don't worry. This is a clean demon. This is a clean demon. Don't be afraid." There's an emphasis here placed on "unclean" and Christ handling, curing, throwing out and making pure what is unclean. So for all of us who are unclean (which is all of us), amen.

Let's keep going. Pick it up in verse 42, "And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.' And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea." So that doesn't sound significant, but it really is. He's trying to leave the area, people come out and say, "Please don't leave the area." He's like, "No, no, no. I've got to leave the area. I've got this thing I've got to do. I've got to preach the good news to this whole area, not just here." But let me just show you what's happening of significance here. I don't know where all of you've lived and how many times you've moved. I'm a military brat. We jumped around a lot. But one of the things that can happen in a given place is you can become very, very, very comfortable. You can know where everything is, you can know the restaurants that you like to eat in, you can know where your friends' houses are, you can know where to go when your kids are sick, you can find that perfect doctor, you can find that perfect job, you can find that house you've always dreamed of and you can find all that is perfect and you can settle into this very, very comfortable kind of cruise ship existence, at least externally. One of the things that is happening here

is Jesus, the hometown boy, has showed up on the scene. He is a better preacher than anyone in His area. Now, throw in the fact that He's God in the flesh and can command demons and cure all diseases—He's wildly popular. So right now we've got Osteen, don't we? No, I'm just saying he is a wildly popular cat. I'm not dogging the man. He's got a jet, he could have me killed and no one would care. I mean, the man is big time right now. He is wildly popular. He's got crazy books. Everybody loves this guy. Now I'm just calling it, I don't think—and listen, I'll talk about myself here. I don't think that I want to go start again. I've been at the Village Church for five years. The first two years were kinda fun, and I like where we are right now. And so I don't want to go start again. So Jesus, hometown boy—everybody knows His name—He can't even go to desolate places without getting mobbed. Isn't that what we just read? He heads to a desolate place and what do the crowds do? They hunt Him down. "Please don't leave. Please stay." But what does Jesus do? "No no, that's not My mission. Yeah, I could stay here. You love Me in the synagogue. I could stay, but that's not My mission." He's still living it out. This is His first little piece of, "Oh, no, no, no. Stay, be king. Stay, be exalted. Stay." And I know the prevailing thought is, "Why wouldn't He be exalted? Why wouldn't He be? He's the king of the universe." Yeah, but He's come to be slaughtered. He's come as a slave. Philippians 2—emptied Himself, came to die, came to serve. "Yeah, I know I'm popular here, but I'm out." And He leaves. It's profound. He's doing exactly what He said He was going to do.

Let's keep going. This is another really, really big piece—5:1—and this should give us all hope. "On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.'" Now already we're going to get insight into our boy. "And Simon answered, 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.'" I love this man's personality. Because although he knows that Jesus is an authority, he wants to voice the respect for that authority, but at the same time still just kind of go, "I don't know." You've got to love this guy. He's us. Let's keep reading here. "And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.' And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him."

Let me tell you why this is profound here without going into a lot of detail about how it works. Young Jewish boys were separated out very, very early, and they began to be taught the Torah. And those who became proficient in it, were quicker to pick it up, were quicker to understand it. They basically got bumped up to another level of education. While those who were a little bit slower got sent back to their daddies to learn a trade. And then they would take the sharper ones and they would move them on and then they would see who the sharpest of that group was and then they would move that one on and anyone who wasn't the best of the best, they would send back to their daddy to learn a trade. So if Jesus is calling men who are fishing, then they're not the sharpest knives in the drawer now, are they? How a rabbi normally chose his disciples was he wanted men who could take on his yoke, his teaching. They wanted men who were the best of the best of the best who could take his teaching and spread it the most effectively. So they're looking for the best and the brightest. Peter and his boys are not of that crowd. They're not. But Jesus just called His first disciples and not from among the religious elite. He went right onto the deck of "The Deadliest Catch." For those of you without cable, that's a show. Some of you look really confused right now. He walks right onto this fishing boat and says, "Yeah, come on." How unreal is this, that God's way of engaging humanity, God's way of setting the oppressed free, God's way of doing this is to engage men who have already been pretty much routed out of the religious system? "Alright businessman, alright businesswoman, alright coach, alright pro athlete, alright comptroller, CPA, alright, here we go."

It looks like He's calling from among the workforce. There's this old idea, this old doctrine, it's called the priesthood of the believers. We don't really believe it which is why we get our own parking spaces and things like that. But in the end, Christ considers you every bit the minister He considers me.

Let's go to verse 12. "While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy." He doesn't have leprosy; he's full of leprosy. I don't know if you've had the opportunity to see that, but it's pretty horrific. "And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.'" I want you to continually see in the Gospels how often disease is referenced as uncleanness. Not, "Heal me"—"Make me clean." "And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him." I don't know what you know about leprosy, but stuff's falling off. I mean, we're missing fingers, probably nose, most definitely lips. If you're full of leprosy, you've lost parts of your body. And this man falls at the knees of Jesus and says, "If you'd just but will it, I can be clean." And Jesus is like, "I will." And bam! Nose, fingers, everything back. I'm just imagining. Verse 14, "And he charged him to tell no one, but 'go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.' But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray." Once again, you have Jesus engaging full on with people that the ruling religious establishment would have viewed as spiritually unclean.

Let's keep reading. "On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'" That's new territory. "And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, 'Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "'Your sins are forgiven you,'" or to say, "'Rise and walk'"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the man who was paralyzed—'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home' And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen extraordinary things today.'" I'll say yeah. That would be great. I want to point out something here. Historically, for a man to forgive or for a man to get forgiveness from God for his sins, he would've had to work the system, the law. There would have been penance, there would have been repayment, there would have been action. This man has done nothing but be lowered into a room, and what does Jesus do? Forgives his sins. The man did nothing but get lowered into a room, and Jesus forgives his sins. There's starting to be a shift.

Let's keep going. I love this one. "And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'" Now we've covered this before, but I always want to cover this with you. This idea of tax collector—to me it's one of the biggest pieces in the gospel because I don't think there is any modern day equivalent, not in our country. Here's how I'll unpack this. Rome is ruling the world from England to India. You rule a land mass that size, when you don't have fighter jets or missiles you can launch from a few thousand miles away, with a massive, massive, massive army filled with mercenaries from other countries you've conquered. And the only way to fund a massive army of mercenaries with weapons and food is to tax the mess out of the people. This man, Levi, had purchased from Rome the right to raise funds for an oppressive mercenary force that was responsible for the death of hundreds and thousands of their kinmen. We do not possess an equivalent of that that I'm aware of, that a guy like that would openly and freely roam. It would be like your

neighbor raising funds for a person who had killed people in your family. Not going to be the most popular guy on the block. So listen, you read this in the historic context, I completely get their grumbling. But what's Jesus doing here? He's going to the darkest of dark, and He's saying, "Come on." Because if God can forgive the tax collector, everyone else is a step under. That's why I always giggle about the self-esteem gospel, because it's just not in the Bible. Like Paul in his writings, he's not, "I'm great and I'm good and by golly, Jesus loves me." You're just not going to find that. In fact, his rejoicing was in his weakness and God's love for him in that weakness. But Paul says what? "I was a blasphemer. I was a violent man. I persecuted the church. I imprisoned Christians. I was on the giving end of a lot of beat downs." And then what? Why did God save him? Well, Timothy says He saved him so that the patience of God might be known to those in the future who would be called.

Why is He calling Levi? So that every prostitute, any person with secret shame, any person with hidden darkness would go, "If He could love the tax collector, I'm okay." This is profound. Setting the captives free, removing the blinders from the blind. This is a profound deal that He would call Levi. And keep in mind we also said that He was going to engage the religious consistently. Are you starting to see that kind of pick up? They're starting to get worried about Jesus. We just read that they were coming from all over the area to hear Him.

Now, here's where it'll start getting aggressive. Verse 33, "And they said to him, 'The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.'" Now, part of it is who Jesus' disciples are. John's were probably ghetto, too; we just don't know. But the Pharisees' disciples would have been very educated. I mean, Jesus has got fishermen. But listen to what Jesus is going to say to them. "And Jesus said to them, 'Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.'" By the way, we're in those days right now. "He also told them a parable: 'No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins.'" By the way, this is probably the most abused text in the history of Christianity. Anybody who wants to try anything new, regardless of how biblical it is or unbiblical it is, will come to this text as ammunition of why they have to do something new. "If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'" I would love to take the next twenty minutes and unpack this text as best I can, but we need to press forward. He is engaging them on how they view spirituality. He is doing that thing I told you He would do last week, where He is trying to set the captives free, and the Pharisees have been held captive by the law.

And you're going to see, especially this next text, what happens. Luke 6, starting in verse 1, "On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?' And Jesus answered them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?' And he said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.' On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him." So there's a man in their midst who is physically deformed, and the reason they want him healed is so that they might attack Jesus. That religious spirit's a weird one, isn't it? "But he knew their thoughts,..." How often has this happened to them now where they're just thinking something and He's like, "Why do you think that?" You would think that eventually it would be like "Ghostbusters" where they're like, "Clear your mind...clear your mind...clear your mind...what did you do?" Verse 8, "But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come and stand here.' And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy

it?' And after looking around at them all he said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus." Later on, Jesus is going to ask a great question: "Was the man made for the Sabbath or the Sabbath for the man?" What Jesus is doing here is He's getting into the heart of the commands of God. To these men and women, particularly the Pharisees and the scribes, the law was given and if you don't obey it and don't measure up to it, you're judged. And so they see the law as the defining element of who they are. It becomes their pride. It becomes their strength. It becomes their way of saying, "We're into now this right action, being okay even if you don't have a right heart." And we talked about this at length last week, where the idea was, "as long as I can control my behavior, God is okay with me." Now Jesus is going to attack this idea over and over and over again. And what He's unpacking here is that the laws that God set into motion, that six and one rhythm, that day of Sabbath, the commands of God that were given, were given not to oppress man but to set man free and that if man would honor the heart of the law, what God is after, then he would be set free. But if you took them and you made them extreme and you made them chains, then you would destroy. And this is one of the things we've tried to teach over and over and over again here because probably the largest misconception about God's people is we are these sexually repressed, closed-minded, miserable men and women who long to destroy anyone having a good time. Is that not how we're portrayed? You guys not watch "The Simpsons?" This is exactly how we're portrayed. This is what we are. But the Scriptures and Jesus' coming is going, "Oh no, no, no. I'm leading you into joy. Do you know how much better marriage works when you're rested? Do you know how much more patient you are with your kids when you're rested? Do you know how more efficient you are when you're rested? The heart of the law is depth of living. The law is tapping us into how things are at the deepest level of the universe. But you're taking the Sabbath and you're making it chains. You've completely removed the heart of it. Seriously? Don't eat on the Sabbath? Don't heal a man's hand on the Sabbath? Are you kidding Me? This is not the nature of the Sabbath law. The nature of the Sabbath law is, 'Rest. Rest. I've got it! That's the nature of the Sabbath law. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath.'" Here's what He's communicating. "It's not about doing; it's about being. And you're never going to know that if you're always doing. So at least once a week, stop doing. Rest in the fact that I love you right now. I love you. The year of the Lord's favor. I love you. You don't have to do. I love you. Don't do, be. But if all you've got is task lists even when it comes to your spirituality, that's where the Sabbath gets violated." So He's going, "You misunderstand the law." And by the way, doesn't He just absolutely accuse them of that in John 5? When He says, "You've studied the Scriptures for years but you've never heard My Father's voice."

Let's round this out. Verse 12. "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God." I don't know if you're picking up on that, but that's the third time in two chapters it's mentioned Jesus withdrawing to connect with the Lord. I just want to continually point out the fact that there is no hypocrisy within this man. He is not going, "Be...be...be," and then, "Do...do...do." That's not what He's doing. You're going to find Him over and over again seeking desolate places, seeking places to be quiet, seeking places to seek the Lord and just be. You're going to find this over and over and over again as we finish out this book in the next four to five years. "And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." If this was a draft, if you look at this as like the NFL draft, they did poorly. If we read this like it was a sport and we're reading like the NFL, that last line would be like, "...and Judas Iscariot, who had no hands. Wide receiver, taken out of Jerusalem, Judas Iscariot, no arms or legs—first overall pick." I mean, this is not a good draft for Jesus in the pursuit of changing the world. I mean, you are looking at a who's who of needing some serious help. Now I'll point it out the rest of the time we're in this book. James can never remember what Jesus says so he has to bring people back to Jesus. Like He keeps sending James out and James is like, "I don't remember. Come on,"—brings him back. Peter's starting fights—with Jesus. I mean all of these guys have massive issues. John, codependent, just loves everybody, never wants to have the hard conversations. Judas is going to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. I mean, this is a bad draft. Somehow it makes me feel really warm. It's like there's this deep hope in me that He's still in this business of calling people who

have no business being chosen by God, who have these areas of their life that are still filled with struggle and strife, who although they've been in church or in the synagogue for a long, long, long time, still have these kind of spots that they're struggling to get victory in. It's like He could love them and use them and call them and even empower them to walk powerfully despite the fact that a lot of the time they're absolutely confused.

Let's do this last little one and then we'll stop. "And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all." The ministry of Jesus continues to flow, continues to move. He continues to do exactly what He said He came to do. Now, in just a few years, Jesus is going to say He has to go. He's going to go, "Look, I've got to go. I've got to go sit at the right hand of the Father. I've got to make intercession for you. I've got to get out of here." And they're troubled by that. And He goes, "Oh no, no, no. I've got to go so that the Spirit will come and you will be able to do even greater things than these." All that being said—setting the captives free, removing the weight from the oppressed, opening blind eyes, proclaiming the Lord's favor—these things that Jesus came to bring—they're still moving, still happening, still occurring. He's still calling to Himself broken, unworthy men who you would never guess could be used by God. So I know some of you are sitting out there and you think that this is for a type of person or this is for somebody other than you or that you've got this in your heart and this in your life and you struggle with this and God not only doesn't love you but He definitely doesn't have some great ministry for you, some active power to love on others and share the gospel with others, not you. Other guys like this guy or that guy or this guy you know at your work who reads My Utmost for His Highest everyday and plays the acoustic guitar. We can see why God would use that guy, but not me. "I struggle, I've been trying to read the Bible for years. I get bored easy. I don't know what to do." No, listen—shhh. This is what He has always done. Paul's going to say it was, "Despite my brain that He called me." No, Jesus calls the anybodies. In fact, it almost seems like the more busted up you are, the more He really likes to empower you. I gave you a challenge a while back: Did Sampson do anything right? I mean, he's got some woman problems. He breaks his Nazarite vow from day one. Like even the story we teach our kids in this great celebration of the strength of the Lord in him, he picks up the jawbone of a donkey. That's a sin. He's not allowed to touch a dead thing. It's a Nazarite vow. But God's doing what? Power through this man, strength through this man, power through... And then after this codependent relationship of his goes horrifically wrong and he ends up with his eyes gouged out and enslaved, he still cries out to God, "Let me kill some of these fools for You." He's done nothing but fail his entire deal and what does God do? He fills him with power again. A man whose life is marked with nothing but failure. And even when he does what's good and right, he sins while doing what's good and right. David—an adulterer or a murderer. Pick one. I think there's only four that you could pick that we've got nothing on, and the Bible's filled with a lot of dudes.

So I wanted to make maybe a deal with you tonight. How about we get over ourselves? So you've failed, so you've struggled. Welcome to life on fallen earth. That's why the cross is such a cool deal. How about we stop, "Woe is me-ing it." And if we're going to do that, let's do it at the feet of the King who can fill us with His Holy Spirit and send us out. You're going to stumble along the way—there's no doubt. But I'm assured of two things watching the life of Jesus. He is the great reconciler, the great restorer. He loves and is glorified by using people that no one in a religious setting would go, "That's the guy." And as we stumble along the way, there's grace. There is no hypocrisy in this man. He can be trusted. So I know you're going, "What does this mean? Do I have to do this or do this or do this?" How about we just stop and see Jesus for who He is? How about we let that settle? How about we let that sink in? How about we get rid of this perception that God is in the heavens somewhat perturbed with us? How about we maybe let the fact of Him walking up to a tax collecting booth to a man named Levi and says, "Hey, why don't you come hang out with Me for the next three?"—how about we let that settle? Why don't we read over this list of disciples and believe maybe just for a second that, no matter where we are or what we've been through, what our past is, what our present reality is, that the Spirit of

Christ might transform, heal and empower? Or maybe we can keep doing church, but I've said for five years that is the lamest hobby I have ever heard of.

Let's pray. The Scriptures say that by beholding Him we are transformed from one degree of glory to the next. So where are you today? Any part of you oppressed, held captive? Jesus is going to say, "Come to Me. Come to Me. Lay those things at My feet. Don't pretend. Don't lie. Come to Me. Get off the religious jargon and all those kind of external expectations. Come to Me." Maybe you've got an area of your life that's really misfiring right now. Like marriage is very, very difficult or your children are very, very difficult. Or work or this relationship or something with your family, it's just off and you feel like you're almost blind, that you can't understand why and you can't see how it's happening and you don't know how to fix it. Since Jesus is the one that's able to remove blinders and enable us to see, why don't we ask Him for that? Maybe today you could just sit under the great proclamation of the favor of the Lord. I mean seriously—that He has favor for us? There's no secret in us that He doesn't know completely and yet still His favor covers us? Or maybe we're just bankrupt in spirit right now, just poor in spirit, just exhausted and tired. He came to proclaim good news to the poor. "Jesus, we want to trust You. We want to submit our lives to You. We want to see the universe through the lenses of Your lordship. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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