

We're going to do things a little bit different this morning. I am actually not even supposed to be here. The elders, after six years here, saw fit to give me a little bit of time off. It's been a really crazy six years, and so they gave me a hunk of time off. But there was no way in the world I was going to miss baptism weekend. So we literally just flew back in for this, and then we'll jet right back out this next week. And I'll tell you why, let me tell you the kind of stuff that happens over and over again on baptism weekend. At 5:00 last night, I came in and stuck my head in the back. There were five people being baptized. I didn't know one of them. I had never even seen any of them. So I just prayed with them, encouraged them and then walked out here. And I got right about here when this guy grabbed me and hugged me. I didn't know him, so that's awkward. But he grabbed me and hugged me, and he goes, "Hey, you don't know me. I've been coming here for about six months. And before that, I was homeless for about five years, but we don't have time. Um, I brought a witch with me here tonight, a legitimate witch and she's furious. So I just want you to be aware that there's a witch here tonight who's angry that I brought her here. So just be praying or whatever." And then he just walked away, and I'm like, "What does that mean? What do I even do with that?" I'm just like, "Okay Lord, I trust You." So I do what I do and it comes time for baptisms. And the third woman who's in her early thirties gets in the water and says, "For the last fifteen years of my life I've been actively involved in paganism and witchcraft, and here's what Christ did to save me from that. Here is why He's better. Here is why He's sovereign. Here is why He's beautiful." Now how surreal is it that in suburbia, at the Village church, of eight services, the one that a guy brings a witch to, we're baptizing a former witch? Maybe you're losing the glory and beauty of God in that, but that was profound to me. I'm just sitting here going, "Are you serious?" So I don't want to miss it. And then my favorite was the guy right after the witch who was like, "I grew up a Baptist and never really knew the Lord, and I just came to find out His grace and glory." And I was like, "God can save both from witchcraft and the Baptists." I thought that was profound.

Now, if you've got your Bibles, let's go to Ephesians 3. We're going to pick it up in verse 8. "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." So something's broken.

And I get in trouble, I get a lot of hate mail because I do some of this. Something's gone wrong in Evangelicalism. And what I mean by that is this. The Scriptures say that what should occur is the world would see the church (believers in Christ), and they would live in such a way and walk in such a way that the rest of the world would spot God's wisdom in us. Now, what's happened is the flip side. What you're finding is that some of them are very spiritual people, they are interested in Jesus Christ, they are interested in the teachings of Jesus but they want nothing to do with the church. So something's gone wrong. Because what's supposed to happen if there is a complaint, it's this. Those people believe in Jesus, how they live is profound and deep and beautiful and the community they walk in is unreal, but "Ah, I'm just not really a God guy." So if there's a complaint, it's that way. And so something's gone horribly wrong because the church is supposed to be this picture of the manifold wisdom of God. Now, about the time I was eighteen, right after Josh Patterson got saved, right after Michael Bleecker got saved, the guys that you see the most on this stage, we became interns, which is church talk for "slave labor." And basically they prepare you for ministry by making you 90hrs a week and giving you \$1000 for the summer. So that actually is great preparation. We begin to do those things, and before long all of us ended up in very large churches. And some of us ended up in churches that are even larger than large churches.

And we began to work there, and some of the things that we saw made us go, "Does that display the wisdom of God? Does the outside world, do even believers in Christ watch how this is happening and go, 'I can see the wisdom of God in that?'" And we would doubt it. Now, it wasn't our place to complain or war or cause trouble; we were interns.

When you're an intern, you don't go in to shift philosophy and doctrine. You're picking up dry cleaning. So it was one of those things where we just went, "I wonder if you can do it differently. It seems like you should do it like this." So one of the great things about the staff here at the Village is a lot of us go way, way back. Patterson and I go way back, Bleecker and I go way back. Anne Lincoln, Paul Matthies, Blake Chilton, some of us who have been doing ministry here for five and a half years, we've been doing ministry together for much longer than that. I think that's a really beautiful piece honestly. We're hoping to be 60-70 year old men and women together and giggling about all God did through a group of...I don't know what word to use there. So when we got here, we decided to do things a certain way, not knowing if it would work or not. Let me give you some examples of that. We wanted to handle our staff in a certain way. We wanted to take care of them. We wanted to pay them well. Nobody's driving a Ferrari or living in 5,000 sq. ft., but we wanted to take care of them. We never wanted them to have to leave this church and go to another bigger church that could pay them better so that they might support their family. We want to be able to support our pastors here. We want to be able to take care of them. They're not getting rich, but we want to take care of them. Here is a big one. We wanted this to be a safe place for them to not be okay, because they're humans and they live in a broken and fallen world. So if they had a dark month, if they struggled, if they slipped up and fell, we wanted to create a safe place where they could come and say, "I need help" and not disappear. Because we had been on staff at places where a guy would voice his weaknesses, and he would just vanish. I mean, I don't know if they killed him or what. He would just disappear. And then the crowd wouldn't even get told they were gone. The people would go, "What happened to the pastor of discipleship?" "Who?" "Gary." "Huh?" There was nothing, it was just silent. The guy would just disappear and it wasn't unpacked at all. He would just vanish. And so we were like, "Let's just set aside part of our budget that if some of our staff need to retreat, if some of our staff need counseling, let's create that for them." We want to take care of them. We want to have a lot of fun here. We have fun days with our staff. We want to keep in front of them that at the end of the day they are not CEO's or businessmen, they are men and women of God who are called by God to serve Him faithfully with all their resources. So on the first Monday of every month, there is no work done here at the Village. We shut it down, we fast and we pray and right our hearts and minds before the living God. We wanted to do it this way.

I'll even be more honest, awkwardly honest. There's a guy on TV that thinks everyone should be getting a paycheck for loving Jesus. I don't think terrestrial greed is a form of Christianity. There are times here where we've had to let people go. And there are two issues that can come up. One is competence and one is character. There can be character issues where we want to love on them and continue to walk with them but they've disqualified themselves from the position. And then there are times where they love the Lord with all their heart, but they just can't do the job. It's just over their heads. Like if you start talking to me about math, my mind just locks down...simple math even. If you want to talk history, theology or literature, I'm all day with you. When division gets involved, I'm just in a lot of trouble. Or you can just hire somebody at a time when the church is around 300 people and they excel at their job, but at the time it hits 3,000, they just can't do the job anymore and people start getting wounded because they're incapable, them being one of those people. And so there are times that we've had to let people go. And here's what we do. We're not going to lie to you. We're going to stand up on the stage and we're going to be honest. And I'm saying this because this happened this week. There were two people who stepped down. One did because of health reasons. There's no secret behind that. There's no political agenda behind that. There's some legitimate, very sad health issues that came up, and Lori needed to go be with her family and she needed to get help. And then we let a guy go this week. We let a guy go because there was some competency issues that had habitually come up that we had worked with for over a year, and it wasn't getting better but getting worse. So we had to let him go. So you got an e-mail about that this week. We want to be honest about those things. We don't to lie. And listen, I know we're not going to win on this one with some of you. Because if at the end of

the day we aren't up front about things like this, there will be this group that's like, "Something's going on. That's not the truth." But then if we come out and tell you the truth, there's another group that's like, "That's so harsh. Uncaring is what you are, pastor." So we know we're not going to win on this, but here where we're going to err. I'm going to err on truth always. I would rather err on being honest with you than err by lying to you. And so that's how we're going to handle our staff. Because we believe that reveals the manifold wisdom of God. Because the guy we let go, we're going to take care of him, we're going to take care of his family, we're going to help him find another job. We're going to be very gracious in these things. We think this reveals the manifold wisdom of God.

How we handle our money, we're not extravagant here, are we? If you're drinking coffee here right now, you brought it with you. If you're drinking a caramel macchiato, you brought it with you. You didn't get to order that at a bar here. And I'm not anti-coffee; I'm actually quite the opposite. Let me tell you why the suburbs are so toxic. Everything in the suburbs communicates to you that everything is about you. And there is nothing more toxic to the soul than being self-absorbed. Why would we spend millions of dollars to create an environment that reinforces to you everything that everything else out there is teaching you? It's why we keep adding services as opposed to building some monstrosity. It's why we went the Albertson's route instead of buying 70 acres of land. Do you know that in order to park everyone, we would need 26 acres just to park us? Do you know how much that's going to cost around here? It's why we didn't go that route. It's why every time you get in the traffic jam that is the parking lot, I think that's good for your soul. You're going to get frustrated, you're going to go, "I'm not coming back here," those things are going to happen. You're going to want to tell one of the parkers that he's No.1. I get it. All that's going to happen. But what I'm telling you here is there's something very, very good for your soul in all of that. There's a slight, subtle reminder that there is one King of the universe and it is not you. We want to give away more and more and more of the resources of this church to the poorest of poor in the darkest countries on the planet. Right now scheduled to leave this summer we have a family leaving to Zambia, we have a family leaving to Kenya, a family leaving to Guatemala. We want more and more of our money, more and more of our resources, more and more of our people to combat poverty and injustice in the darkest corners of the earth as well as right here in Dallas. To do that, you're going to need to forego your coffee bar experience here, your teenagers are going to have to forego their rock wall experience here, their skate park experience here. Now I'm not saying those things are wrong, I'm saying it's not our heart here. Everything we do financially here is open. And what I mean by that is if you go online today when you get home, you can go to www.thevillagechurch.net and click on "Financial Ministry" and find out every bit of financial information from the last 3-4 years today. Every year we do an internal audit and we bring a company down to do an external audit over all our books to account for every cent that's spent here, to be scrutinized and be accountable. We have built horrible controls. It would be very, very difficult for anybody to steal a dime out of this place. Why? Because this reflects the manifold wisdom of God, good stewardship. There are times where we have to raise money, we have to do campaigns. When we do that, we want to not make more of it than it is. I was on staff at a place that was building quite the large facility, and the theme was "For the Next Generation." I was like, "Uh, that might be a little over the top. I don't know that 200 years from now our great-great-grandbabies are going to be in the Albertson's building we bought. It probably won't be structurally sound.

So I don't know that by building a new building you're going to reach the next 150 years of people. You might. But it seems like if you borrow a verse from David building the temple and put it on your building campaign, that's a little bit of weird proof texting, is it not? Maybe not, but it sure seems like it to me. It seems shady. It seems like Branch Davidian. I mean, he's taking the Bible and telling everyone he's Jesus. He's having to proof text to do that. We don't want to do that, so here's how it works here. It's very simple, it's very honest and there's no flash to it. We've never bought you a chicken dinner, ever. You know, that dry stuff that they have to put peach sauce on top of it just to make it so you could swallow it. We haven't done that. Here's what happens. We wanted to buy the Albertson's, we were at six services, we were turning away from almost all of them, and the Albertson's became available, I walked up on stage and launched out on the campaign. What was it called? "We Need \$4 Million in the Next Sixty Days." That was the name of our

campaign. There was never a thermometer, no t-shirts, no team built to get everybody riled up. It was just me walking up here going, "Uh, we need \$4 million in sixty days." And it worked. Then when it came time to renovate, I came up here we did a series of meetings where we unpacked for you what it cost, why it cost that, where it was. And then I came in and said, "Okay, for the next three years we need \$10 million." And that's all we did. We didn't want to make more of it than it is. We just want to be honest with you because we believe that if we are honest with you, that works better than trying to manipulate you.

Here's the last thing that I think reveals the manifest wisdom of God. My wife and I got away this last week. We left the kids with the in-laws and my at parents. We went up to Colorado. I sit on the board of directors for an organization called Acts 19, which is a church planting network. The board just gave us some time up in Colorado, so we went up to Vail. One of the things I love about Dallas is anytime you leave Dallas and go anywhere, that place is just spectacular. We went up to Vail, and just Lauren and I hung out. So I read some magazines and watched a little bit of TV, and here's what I saw this week. I actually watched a guy stand up and just basically say that God does want you to be wealthy and happy and if you would just believe in yourself and have enough faith, then that's going to happen. I'll tell you what's so confusing for me about people buying into that. What's so confusing to me is it doesn't work. The only people getting rich off of your faith are those guys. It's not the gospel. I started getting angry, so I turned the channel to CNN, and I heard Dobson's take on Obama. Dobson flamed on Obama. Apparently there is a Christian organization that is boycotting Starbucks now because they went back to their old logo. Basically they uncovered the mermaid's chest. So they've decided to boycott and have started this national campaign to boycott Starbucks. And I have strong opinions about all three of those things, particularly the first one because I think it's so damnable. And I know, "Oh Chandler, don't be so harsh on that idea. I mean, if it brings people to God..." Let me be very, very clear with you. Without the cross of Jesus Christ, you are not getting to God. If a guy says, "I don't preach about the cross, I don't preach about blood," then he's not preaching the gospel, he's preaching something else. It's as clear as that. So although I have strong opinions about all those things, here's what I thought. No wonder people are so confused about what Jesus taught, about what Christianity is. No wonder there's fear about it. No wonder there's confusion. No wonder there's anger. Is it that if we are all good people and we believe in ourselves and we trust, then we'll be wealthy and happy and everything's going to work? Is that it? Is it political? Is it that we have to rally the troops and politically get what we want? Is it moral? Is it that you should keep your shirt on? What is it? Because all three of those things, although isolated incidents, are teaching the people around us what Christianity is and what it isn't. No wonder they're so confused. So what we want to do here week in and week out is very, very simple. We want to teach the gospel. So what's the gospel? I think sin, when all is said and done, although it's viewed very negatively, is really a good thing. Let me you why. Sin gives you framework for why it's not working. Let me give you some examples of sin that are kind of unorthodox. You've got, "Okay, killing someone is a sin," or "I get the Ten Commandments. Those are sin," but here's what I would tell you. Sin is really you taking anything other than God and making it ultimate. If you make anything other than God ultimate in your life, you're going to eventually be dashed on the rocks. Let me give you some examples. Yesterday I was in my office working when my five year old daughter ran in. She was just beaming going, "Look! Look! Look!" She has her first loose tooth, so she's showing it off. So I play with her little loose tooth in my office. And it would be so easy for me to take my daughter, take my son and make to make them ultimate in my life. But here's what happens if they become ultimate. If they become ultimate then my identity is built on what happens with them. What happens if one day they just turn their back and walk away? I get dashed on the rocks. What if they mature like they're supposed to, find a spouse and leave? That's supposed to happen. Do you hear me? Specifically to you dudes, if you're living with your mom and are like, "I'm trying to find a girl," girls find jobs attractive. It's weird. It's how it's been designed to work. So what's going to happen when they leave and they start their family? Well now I have no identity anymore. I love my wife. I way out-punted my coverage. I have a very, very beautiful wife who is fun and brilliant and one of my best friends. But women make horrible gods. They can't fulfill, they can't sustain, they can't transform. Husbands make horrible, horrible gods. But here's what I would tell you. If you're trying to make your husband your god and he doesn't fulfill you and he doesn't satisfy you, the sin is yours, not his. He is not God. To find

your fulfillment or even seek it in him is in the end preparing you to be dashed on the rocks. So take money, take your career, take any good thing and make it ultimate. It's just a matter of time before it betrays you. Not only that, but you've got to become very insecure and very manipulative and very greedy because you have to protect your god. So anytime somebody flirts with your spouse or anytime your kids look bad or anytime you get demoted or anytime somebody gets promoted above you, there are these things that happen, jealousy, anger, bitterness, rage. Why? Because your identity is in temporary things that will always fail you. That's what's gone wrong. That's why it's not working. And not only that, it's a blatant offense to God on High, who has created you to worship and love Him, to make Him ultimate. And when that happens, it just works. Because now I'm not putting a weight on my wife that's unbearable. Now I'm not putting a weight on my children that's unbearable. Now I'm not making more of my job than what it is. Now money doesn't define me anymore; I get to give it away. Power doesn't define me; I get to use my power for good, for the glory and kingdom of God. This what happens, you just get free. There's a difference between religion and the gospel. Religion would say that God accepts me because I do; the gospel says God accepts me because of what Christ did. That's why we celebrate the cross. It's the wrath absorbing work of God that forgives us. That's why it's such a weird thing to watch Christians boast. They have nothing to boast in. I've heard people say that Christians are more moral. That has not been my experience. I have met many a pagan who are more moral and better people than some Christians, which makes sense because when you come to Jesus, you come all busted up and He starts sanctifying you over a period of time. This is the gospel.

And I know you're going, "Chandler, I don't know. I've just got problems with the Bible. I watched this special on The Discovery Channel. I've just got problems." Can I just throw a couple of things out? Do you know that in the 1st century a woman's testimony was not admissible in court? If a woman saw someone being murdered and it went to court, a she would be unable to testify in court. They would not take her word. Isn't it interesting that the 1st century of Jesus' resurrection was witnessed by a woman? If you're going to rewrite the story in the first 100 years, don't you write out the woman whose evidence wouldn't have even been admissible in the modern court? Or if you're going to be political about this, wouldn't you write out Jesus agonizing in the garden not wanting to go to the cross? Don't you write that one out? How about the fact that the apostles are morons from beginning to end? Are they not, every one of them? Wouldn't you write out the fact that all of them die very, very badly? You would think that that wouldn't be such a great recruiting tool. "Come be like Paul. He was beaten, he was stoned, he was left for dead twice, shipwrecked twice and eventually gets arrested and gets his head cut off. Join us." I mean, don't you write that one out? And I know all about the gospel of Thomas. "What about the Gnostic gospels, Chandler? The writes of the Bible we have excluded these other documents. It was a political move." Let me throw this at you. From what you know just from TV about Rome and Hellenization of the Greeks, what seems more politically correct, the gospel of Thomas that teaches that the external world is completely evil, unable to be redeemed but the spirit is pure (that's very Hellenistic) or the gospels that say the world can be redeemed, will be redeemed and there will be a physical resurrection and God will make all things new? What sounds political? One that would say a rich, affluent people must view their world differently, their power differently or the gospel of Thomas view that would say everything external is dirty so eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die and at death we're freed up? It's Thomas that's political. The gospels are countercultural. You've at least got to hit this thing honestly. If this has been rewritten over the last couple thousand years, it's been a really horrible rewrite. Why would you put Job in the Bible? Have you read this book? Why would you put this book in the Bible? An upright, righteous man who gets pummeled by God. Everybody in his family killed except his wife, who's a nag. His friends betray him, his countrymen betray him, he is medically smitten. Why would you put this one in there? Why don't you leave that one out? It's a horrible recruiting tool. "You can love God and things go horribly, horribly, horribly wrong. Join us." This doesn't make any sense. It hasn't been rewritten.

This is the gospel, it's what we want to teach here. Week in, week out, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, the cross of Christ. What you're about to see is men and women show this to you by being buried with Christ and resurrected. He's making Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf that we might become the righteous, perfect life of Christ. What an

exchange. Shouldn't you want this to be true? Like, I get secularism. I get it, but there's some real huge holes in it. Like, I love my wife...I love her. And I refuse to believe that my affection and love for Lauren is just neurons popping off in my head, that love has no significance, no meaning, no depth, no nothing, it's just chemicals firing off in my brain. It's such a weird thing, I think secularists are. Okay, so what's love? Do you not believe in love? You can, but love is chemical for you. Or what do you do with beauty? What makes something beautiful? Have you ever stood and just been in awe of something? We were up in Vail and you've got the valley there and the peaks and you're just looking at all these things. And it's not like it gives you anything. I didn't come home with anything. Vail didn't give me anything, it was just beautiful. So what do you do with beauty? Is it just neurons firing off in your head? Is that all beauty is? I mean, what makes something beautiful. I'm telling you, there is a ferocity beneath everything. It's the creator God. And if there is no God, there's no such thing as love, there is no such thing as beauty. Here's another confusing thing about the secular mind and reality. A lot of people I know who are very secular, they just decry that people aren't more involved. "Why aren't we getting more involved in Sudan? Why aren't we getting more involved with the poor?" I'm like, "Well, your own worldview says that eventually the sun burns up and kills all of us and that all of this is meaningless to begin with. Your very worldview is competing with your desire that all of us engage the poor." Shouldn't you want this to be true? It brings meaning, it brings truth, it brings purpose. Religion doesn't. Religion is very exhausting. Do this so you can be accepted? Oh no, no, no. The book of Hebrews says He's no longer taking any offerings for sin. Christ, the cross was that offering.

Let's pray. "Jesus, I thank You for our time together this morning. I know it's been a little bit of a different morning, but I thank You for Your grace and I thank You for Your mercy and I thank You for Your love. I do pray that we would be a place that displays your wisdom, that we would be a place that handles power a certain way, handles money a certain way, handles resources a certain way. I pray that we would be a place that people might not want to have anything to do with You but in the end see the lives we lead and see Your wisdom in it. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."