

How are we? Let's go, Luke 16. As far back as you can trace human history, men have had ideas about how life works and how God works. And so we break those into two sections historically. You have philosophers and you have prophets. And sometimes there's an intermarrying of those two. Confucius is a philosopher and he says, "This is how life. If you do this you're wise, and if you do this you're foolish." That's a philosopher. And then you've got prophets. And prophets tell you what God's like. So Muhammad said, "This is what god is like." He didn't say, "I am God." He said, "This is what god is like. There is one god, Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." In our Old Testament, you've got Elijah who would say, "This is what God is like...This is what pleases Him...This is what doesn't please Him...This is what He says." And what people want to do with Jesus, what other religions want to do with Jesus, what secular men and women want to do with Jesus is they want to put Jesus into one of these two categories. They want to go, "He's a teacher, a philosopher, a moral ethicist" or "He is a prophet. He's one of the guys that shows up and goes, 'This is what God is like.'" The problem with that is actually the teachings of Jesus. Muhammad says, "This is what god is like." Jesus says, "For a thousand years I've been sending you prophets and you keep killing them." Now that's different, correct? At the core of the Christian faith, the Jewish faith and the Muslim faith is a man named Abraham. Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. If you have no church background, that's a children's song. I'm sorry. In that both Elijah and Muhammad will make references back to Abraham, but Jesus goes, "Before Abraham was, I am." That's different. That is very, very different. Or one of my favorites is king David and the Davidic line for the Jews, that was sacred. That was the end-all and be-all pinnacle of Jewish life, and Jesus said, "Yeah, I know David. He called me 'Lord.'" So He is a loon before He is a philosopher or prophet. He is bat stuff crazy before you can call Him a good teacher, a philosopher or a prophet. Because Jesus shows up and says stuff like, "I am" which would translate "I'm God." That's different. You've got to do something here with the man Jesus Christ. You have to. He steps into time, divides it in half. There's not a continent on our planet that hasn't been affected by His message. For those of you who are just People magazine folks, He's been on more magazine than any man in the history of the world. This is a man who has marked history like none other. You've got to do something with Him, and you can't say that He's a philosopher and you can't call Him a prophet, because His teachings and how He taught won't lend Him to be called one of those things. And this isn't like some historical thing. This isn't 2000 years later looking back at it going, "Oh, He was a little bit different." That isn't happening here, because even in Matthew 7 the people who are listening to Jesus say, "Who is this man? He teaches as one with authority and not like the scribes and the Pharisees." So He doesn't teach like someone who reads the Law and then tries to explain it, He reads and teaches like one who wrote it. And so there's this big difference here.

And you're going to see out of this text today, particularly if you've got a little church background and understand the old Law and Prophets, the authority in which Jesus operates. It's a very different thing, and you'll also grasp a little bit why they killed Him. So let's look in Luke 15, starting in verse 14, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Here's what's happening here. They just have an insufficient view of the Law. They're doing the right things, but their heart and motivation is wrong. And so God says they're self-exalting and it's an abomination to Him. They are giving alms to the poor, they have a fish for everyone in their family on the back of their chariot, they do all of those things correctly, but in the end the reason they're doing those things is to gain power and wealth and lord it over other men and harm them. So Jesus goes, "I don't care if your actions are right, you're wicked." So right action doesn't always mean right heart.

Now let's get to where this gets fun for me. Verse 16, "The Law and the Prophets were until John [the Baptist];..." It will take too long to go over all of the Law and all of the Prophets, so let's just use the Ten Commandments here as our kind of base. He just said here that the Law and Prophets were until John the Baptist, which means that they had a period of time and that this transitional figure is John the Baptist. And then look at what comes after him. "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." Let's just look at the complexity of this. He just said that the Law and the Prophets were until this transitional figure, John the Baptist, and since John the Baptist, the kingdom of God is here and it supplants or fulfills the Law and the Prophets, but the Law and the Prophets aren't really ever going away. Can we agree that that's a little loopy and confusing? So let me try to unpack this. If you'll really study the Bible, one of the first things that starts happening to you is you have to do something with the fact that God in the Old Testament seems a little grumpier than the God in the New Testament. It's just like in the Old Testament the reaction is like, "Alright, I'm killing everyone." He just shows up and is like, "Oh, remember when I told you not to touch the treasure and you touched it? Now I'm going to kill you, your wife, your children, your cows, your dog, your cousin, your parents and then I'm just going to burn the city to the ground." And then in the New Testament He's like, "Come to Me all who are weary." So in the New Testament He sits at the table with the thief and the whore, and in the Old Testament He catches them on fire. So you've got to do something with that. And this is what some people think. They think, "Oh, you've got two different Gods" or "As God grew older He kind of mellowed out." You get these really weird ideas that happen.

The truth is the New Testament would unpack it like this. What you've got to be careful of is this idea that here was plan A and plan A failed. So God rolls out the Ten Commandments and goes, "Do these things and things are going to be great, I'll be pleased and you'll walk in fulfillment of life and vitality and energy." And then 2000 years later He looked down and is like, "Oh, this has gone bad. Alright, huddle up. Jesus, Holy Spirit, in here. We gave them the Ten. What are we going to do here?" And Jesus is like, "I'll handle it," and Jesus comes down. And that's kind of Plan B, because Plan A failed miserably. That's a horrible way to look at it because what you've just done is removed the deity from God. Because now God was surprised, His plan didn't work. And you've taken away historic views of God, His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. The Gospel of Luke and on into Acts and the rest of the New Testament, they're going to talk about the Old Testament and the New Testament like this. They're going to talk about a promise made and then a promise fulfilled. So the Old Testament is a promise that was made to God's people, and then it's going to get fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So it's not Plan A/Plan B, it's more Phase I/Phase II. So let me give you Phase I of the plan, and then from Phase I we'll get into Phase II. Phase I is the Law and the Prophets. And intrinsic within all the Law and the Prophets is this distant promise. The Old Testament perpetually points outside of itself. There is no solution to Old Testament promises within the Old Testament. The Old Testament is constantly pointing outside of itself to some type of future fulfillment and intrinsic within each of the laws of God in the Old Testament is this distant promise. Let me give you some examples. Let's go Ten Commandments. Let's start with number one, "Don't have any other gods but Me. Don't worship engraved images." How weak is your god that you have to create its body? That's what He's saying, "Don't worship stuff that's not really God." Here's another way to say it, "Make Me and Me alone ultimate." And if you do, here's the promise that becomes distant. Here's the promise with the first command. "If you seek Me and Me alone, beauty, depth, meaning, vitality and energy is yours and I will be pleased. If you don't, you'll damage your soul and I will be displeased." So the promise is, "If you'll do this, this is what will happen." Now let's do one more. Commandment number ten, "Don't covet your neighbor's stuff, not his wife, not his car, not his house, not his job, not his pool, not where he went on vacation. Don't covet those things." So here's the promise. "If you will learn to see the world through the lenses of what you've been blessed with and what you've been given rather than lives built on a comparison that would have you focused on what you don't have and what you're not getting, life will be meaningful, life will be beautiful, there will be depth, there will be beauty and I will be pleased." So "If you'll do this, this will occur." That's the promise.

Now there's two problems with Phase I. Problem one is we're not good at obeying. In Exodus 20, God gives them the Ten Commandments. Number one, "Don't worship other gods. I just brought you out of Egypt who has all these gods, I ceremoniously beat each one of them down." Go look at the plagues. They had a gods who controlled the water, they had gods that controlled the air, they had gods that controlled the crops, they had all these gods that did all these things. Look at the plagues. God sends locusts, He sends frogs, He turns their water to blood. That's not just oppressing the people, He's showing them, "Hey, your gods aren't really that god-ish." So He gets them to the other side, He gives them the Ten Commandments and He goes, "Don't you go back to gods I just beat down, because they're not really gods." That's chapter 20. By chapter 32, they take the gold that they have, melt it down, make a cow and worship it. We're not good at obeying. We can't seem to do it. It's like something has gone wrong in us because we can't seem to obey the simplest of ethics, the Ten Commandments. We've done that thing in here a hundred times where we run down the Ten Commandments to see which ones we haven't done. We don't need to do it. You stink at all of them, the same as me.

Now, that's the first problem. Here's where it gets even worse. The second problem is even when we do manage to obey all of them, it does not produce worship, life, vitality and meaning. Instead it creates arrogance, pride and. And then we use our disciplined morality to beat up and judge others. So the problem with Phase I which says, "Do these things and vitality, meaning, beauty and life are yours and I will be pleased," is we can't seem to obey and even when we do it doesn't bring about what God wanted it to bring about. Instead it brings about arrogance. And I have found myself on both sides of that story. Like I've had that day where I've broken every commandment. And then I've been on the other side. So this is the problem with Phase I. But these problems are God ordained problems. Because Phase I was never the fullness of the plan. So the Law and the Prophets were until John the Baptist. So John the Baptist comes preaching a gospel of repentance and a gospel of the kingdom of God. He baptizes Jesus, so you have this transition that takes place. Here is Jesus and He's coming and saying, "The gospel of the kingdom is now. Now you don't chase after the Law, your pursuit is not obedience to the Law. Your pursuit Me. Your pursuit is Me and I'm going to make a way for you to chase Me by going to the cross and in the cross covering both of the problems. In the cross, I'm going to cover up the fact that you can't seem to obey and I'm going to remove your ability to be arrogant." I don't know of a greater oxymoron in the universe than a proud Christian. You can't do it. The extent to which a person is boastful about Christianity is the extent to which they reveal they don't understand their own own faith. We have one boast, the cross. That's our only boast. So Jesus comes in and makes a way so that the time of the Law was until John. But now that Jesus is here, we don't pursue the Law, we pursued Jesus Christ.

But watch this, because you've got this other line that we've got to deal with and it's somewhat confusing. "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it." Now we've got to be careful with this, because it almost makes it sound like we're going back to Phase I. It makes it sound like, "We'll force our way in, we'll do what's right to get in." But that's not what it's talking about here. And I could bore you to death with Koine Greek, middle passive voice type stuff, but I'm going to save you from that because you don't care. So here's what's happening here. He's alluding to this idea that's everywhere else in Scripture. He says the same thing in another place like this, "A man finds a treasure buried in a field and in his joy he goes and sells everything he owns and he buys the field. His greatest treasure, his greatest pursuit, the thing he wants more than anything else, more than his comfort, more than the possessions he already has, is that treasure. And he sells it all to get it." What this text means when it says that we "take it by force," it's talking about this single-minded pursuit of Jesus Christ. Christ becomes our treasure, our pursuit, He's what we're after, He becomes the goal, He becomes the means. It's this single-minded devotion to the work and person of Jesus Christ. So now our pursuit is not "Let me obey the Law so that God will be pleased." But rather it's "I want to know Him, I want to worship Him, I want to follow Him, I want to serve Him."

Now let me complete the line. Look at verse 17. "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." So Jesus says, "Even though you pursue Me, even though you chase Me, the Law doesn't go away."

Here's the thing about the Law. The Law is how God designed things to be. The law is about bringing us into how things just are. So all the commands of God are not arbitrary. I mean, God doesn't give these commands and say, "Because I said so." Instead, He gives commands to lead us into how He designed life to work. So we can't just get rid of the Law because it's how He wired the universe to be. Rather He's saying that in a pursuit of Jesus Christ, in a relational pursuit of God in the flesh, the Law gets fulfilled.

Now let me show you His illustration. It will be somewhat shocking, and I'll try to unpack it for you. Look at verse 18. Here's His illustration of the pursuit of Jesus being the fulfillment of the Law. "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Okay, everybody breathe. I don't want anybody freaking out right now. This text is not even about marriage. And so the temptation here is to spin off and do a breakdown of the covenant of marriage and divorce and remarriage and all that. Here's my promise to you. When we're done with Luke, at some point we'll come back and look at the covenant of marriage, divorce and remarriage and what all those things mean and how the Scriptures unpack that. For the moment, I want to point out two things to you. The first thing is what Jesus just quoted to you wasn't the Law. The Law was that you could divorce your wife as long as you gave her a certificate of divorce and made sure she was provided for. So what Jesus just did here was He said, "The Law is not going to go away" and He threw out an even higher ethic than the Law gives. In a relational pursuit of Jesus Christ, in a single-minded devotion to a relationship with Jesus Christ, not only is the Law fulfilled, but a greater ethic actually takes its place. Let me use marriage as the example. Let's say I am a single young man, single-mindedly devoted to Jesus Christ and I've got my eye open and in my crew a beautiful young woman enters the frame. We get to know each other, and it becomes evident that when I'm around this girl my affections are stirred for Jesus Christ because after all I am single-minded. My affections are stirred for Jesus Christ. Through prayer and conversation with this girl (let's call her Lauren), I begin to sense that she is a part of God's plan for my sanctification or she is a part of God's plan to push me even more into the fullness of Jesus Christ. So I buy a ring, I pull my crew together, we get a dry erase board, we come up with a creative idea. I'm trying to help some of you badly. You know, putting it on your foot and going, "Hey baby, rub my foot," that's a bad go, and that's a true story. You make your girl tell you that story, are you serious? So I get the crew together, we have this elaborate scheme of how I'm going to ask her, I ask her, she says yes, we get married, head out and for six months, three months, eight months, a year, three years it goes really well. And then it starts to go bad. And I'm not talking about "She does some stuff that gets on my nerves." Because that's just called marriage, correct? The only people who don't agree are newlyweds. I'll see you in a couple of weeks. You'll be brushing your teeth going, "Oh no you didn't. What is that in the sink?" I mean, it goes bad. I'm talking "I prefer to stay at work than go home" bad. In that, because I am single-minded pursuit of Christ and my understanding is He gave me this woman to loosen up my hands on the things of this world, to reveal in me my pride, to reveal in me my selfishness, to reveal in me how much I think everything is about me, to reveal in me my absolute refusal to love her like I love Jesus Christ. And then I begin to press into Him, as I begin to confess these things to Him that I do have a proud heart. Jesus' teaching about life almost always revolves around your death, not your physical death but you dying to self. That's why He says, "Listen, unless a seed goes into the ground and dies, it will never produce any kind of fruit. You're never really going to walk in how life was designed to be until you can die to yourself and submit and follow Me." And so I lay those things at His feet, I continue to love my wife like Jesus Christ loved the church, despite that it's difficult. And in so doing, a greater ethic has been created than just the one that the Law gave. It's not that I'm going, "Oh, I've got to stay with this woman because the Law says to." That's not what happened. God's not after that type of begrudging submission. No. He's my treasure, He's my joy, He's my fulfillment, He's my goal, He's what I'm after, He's what life is about, He is what happens after life. And so my pursuit is Him, and in my pursuit of Him, a greater ethic is created than one that could ever be created by the Law itself, because the heart's been transformed. Most people white knuckle life. They just go, "This is right, this is wrong. And I need to do what's right." And so they just hold on and go, "I'm going to do right, I'm going to do right, I'm going to do right." But eventually, no matter how strong you are, your grip gives out. And so this is what this text is about. The Law doesn't go away, but "In your pursuit of Me, because My cross covers your

failure to be obedient in your pride, the Law will be fulfilled. It doesn't go away. Your pursuit of Me fulfills it. So here's what we've got to talk about.

There's these really strange statistics about the church right now. There are some surveys that say 78% of our teenagers leave high school and then just don't come back to church. I think there are some reasons for that. I think the church teaches a lot more morality than it does the doctrine of God and who He is. And that's so much more lovely than, "Don't do this." And so this really weird thing happens. Our kids leave, they go to college and then they just freak out and party for eight years. This whole time they believe in God, but there's no real pursuit of God. It's just, "Yeah I believe in God. I grew up there. Blah blah blah." And then we have kids and then we're like, "Oh, we don't want them to be ax murderers or drug dealers. . .Get in the car! Let's go, in the car!" And then you come back to church. Isn't that right? Am I a liar? I'm a lot of things, I'm not lying. Or, and this is very prevalent in the Bible Belt, we come to church and we do these things because it's what our folks do and it's what good folk do. So this becomes a hobby. And I've said it's a lame hobby. It's right up there with collecting stamps. Now if you collect stamps, I apologize. I just don't know enough about it. I'll Google it and maybe come back and apologize to you okay. Right now it just seems like a weird hobby to me. "Oh, she's a beauty!" It's confusing to me, but please don't e-mail me angry. I'll look into it and maybe come back next week and apologize. Now, it doesn't make any sense if you have no real affection for Jesus, no love for Him and just do church as a hobby. I don't know what you're gaining. Because you're operating in a Phase I that was never meant to work.

So here's what happens in the church. I think there are two things that are really wreaking havoc on Evangelicals right now. The first is the Prosperity Gospel which is so dumb it's hard for me not to attack it weekly. Hebrews 11 says by faith some were made kings, by faith some were made wealthy, by faith some were imprisoned, by faith some were sawn in two, by faith some were killed by lions. So spare me this ridiculous nonsense that if you just have enough faith, you're going to be wealthy and healthy. That is a fool's errand that is not found in the Scriptures. Now it is found in the Scriptures if you want to just take that first part of Hebrews 11 and not go down to the bottom part where by faith men were attacked by lions and killed. Anyway, let's keep going. Here's the second problem as I see it, and this one is probably greater than the first. The second problem is the bulk of us have no real affection or pursuit of Jesus Christ at all; we are simply trying to become better people morally. So what we do is look at our past and go, "I'm not the college version of me." Or some of us are like, "I'm not my dad. I'm a better man than he was." And we do this comparison thing where we look back on our lives and go, "I'm not as bad as I used to be, so God's okay with me." And you're wrong. That's not how this works. That's not what this is. Phase I can't work. You're not going to be able to be obedient enough. And even if you can by discipline pull it off, you're just going to become a religious bigot who uses his morality to beat up everyone else and judge them. So what do you do when you have churches filled with people who have no real love, no real affection, no real pursuit of Jesus Christ when that's the fulfillment of the promise? It's also why I contend so many of us have these circular sins in our lives where they really just own us and we get better for a season and we use all our energy and all our discipline to stay away from this or not do this or not go here and we just hang on and hang on and eventually the grip gives out and we fall back into our sin. Because sin is not conquered by sheer discipline, but by a growing love for Jesus that wins out over the power of this thing. I'm telling you, I think that's why church has gotten so goofy. Because we're operating out of a system that doesn't work. "Be good...be good...be good..." Yes, but how? By a single-minded, ferocious pursuit of Jesus Christ. And in that relationship the heart begins to change and that fulfills the law.

Okay so let's do it. Let's not play. Let's not go Phase I. Is there in you any affection for, pursuit of, worship of Jesus Christ? I think you've got to answer it. Is there? Not are you better today than you were six months ago? Part of that is just human nature maturing. You can't chalk that up to the work of God alone. Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? Is there a pursuit of Him? Do you pray? I'm not asking if you wake up at 5:00AM and get on the side of your bed and go, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name..." No, I'm asking if you have a relationship with Christ?

Because the Law and the Prophets were until John. But now the gospel, the good news of the kingdom is here and we're not under the Law anymore. We're under grace. And the Law is fulfilled in the pursuit of Christ. So come on. Who are you? What are you? What are you doing? These are big, thick, nasty questions that the depth and meaning of your life and your future hinge on. Any love? Any pursuit? Any relationship? Any single-mindedness at all? I'm not talking about perfection. That's something for the next life. I'm not saying that you don't struggle. I'm not preaching anything that's not reality here. Do you? See, if the answer is "no, but at one time yes," then let's repent. If the answer is "never," I think you've got to take some real stock and you might be basing your salvation on what your mama or daddy did or the fact that you had good attendance when you were a kid, and those things don't equal salvation. Now you should be proud of those things, that's great. I'm just saying, they hold no weight with God. So if you're in that dry season, is there any pursuit of Jesus Christ? If sin constantly owns you, is there any pursuit of Jesus Christ? These are things that have to be answered.

I know that these are thick things, especially for a holiday weekend, but I felt like if I just had one shot at you here, I needed to be faithful to this text and to love you enough to engage you at this level. I'm not trying to build numerically some church. My dad hugged me plenty. I'm okay. I'm not trying to build some edifice to myself. If you never come back, I'm okay with that. I'm not trying to be your good buddy, but I am trying to unpack for you divine things. And I'm rolling the dice here with you simply because there is in me a deep love for you and for the hope of the gospel in you and that you might be saved from Bible Belt religion that in the end is not going to work. And if you'd be honest with yourself, I think you would have to come to the conclusion that it hasn't worked for you. Coming to church with no relationship with Christ just continues to perpetuate the guilt and shame that He actually came to lift off of you. And so answer the question honestly. Lie to everybody, but don't lie to yourself. That's the disintegration of the soul there. If you want to know what hell is, hell is perpetually walking in self-deceit. Do you know Him? Is there a relationship with Him? Is He a pursuit? Is there any single-mindedness about Him at all or are you just trying to be better? Just trying to be better is banking on the promises but not on their fulfillment. Their fulfillment is Christ. It's okay to wrestle with this stuff. I always tell you, but conviction and weight are objective evidences of God's love for you. It's when you hear these type of things and go, "Nah," that might be wrath. Conviction and weight are objective evidences of God's pursuit of you.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for our time together, and I thank You for these men and women. I thank You for Thanksgiving and family and a lot of food left in the fridge. Thank You that we're not under the Law but grace. Thank You for what that means, and I pray that if there be any confusion in here over this that You would bring clarity to Your children lest they spend the rest of their lives walking in an outdated system that was never built to work. So I pray that You would stir in us affection for You. I pray that the question would just constantly come up in our hearts and minds of what it is that stirs our affections for You and that we would fill our lives with those things knowing that there transformation occurs and there the Law is fulfilled. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."