

Two weeks ago, we started back into Luke, and we said there is a difference between simply ascribing to Jesus, the Bible and God and faith. There's a difference between a verbal "Yes, I believe these things" and biblically what being a disciple of Jesus Christ is all about. In being a biblical follower, there is a fundamental change in our being. There is a fundamental change in how we live our lives that occurs by grace alone, through faith alone, where our heart is awakened to the glory of the gospel. Theologians would call this being regenerated, where our heart is regenerated by the Holy Spirit so that we see differently, live differently, walk differently and we begin a path of progressive sanctification where we grow more and more and more into the likeness of Christ. So we said two weeks ago that the mantra of the disciple is "Christ alone." We are justified by, saved by, rescued by and delivered by Christ alone. In no way do our actions, in no way do our activities, in no way do our right religious behaviors justify us before the God of the universe, but it is in Christ alone that we are justified. So our mantra as Christ followers is "Christ alone."

So here's the second piece. Look in Luke 18, we'll pick it up in verse 15. "Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'" You could go all day in this passage. There are all these really beautiful pieces here where Jesus is not going, "Children are the secondary issue." Jesus is not going, "Oh, I've only got three years. Take the infants away from me. Take the preschoolers out of here. That's not a legitimate ministry." In fact, He goes contrary to that and strongly rebukes His men, even His inner circle for excluding that bracket from His presence. So right away what I want to do is preach long and hard at how preschool and children's ministry is not some junior varsity idea in the kingdom of God because Christ rebuked His inner circle, even the inner three, for feeling that way, acting that way and operating that way. But I don't have time to preach on that, so let's just keep moving.

What I want you to notice here is specifically verses 16 and 17. Because we've got to ask ourselves some questions because it's a little bit muddy. Verse 16, "But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'" So apparently, even small children can become regenerated believers in Jesus Christ. They don't need to be fifteen years old and able to quote the Westminster confession of faith to be a believer. You can be a very young believer in Jesus Christ. "To these belong the kingdom" is a huge statement. He's going to unpack it further in the last verse. "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." So you've got two things happening here. He's not talking to children here. I grew up in a Baptist church, and maybe not all Baptist churches did it this way. But we had children's time up front. So you did a couple of songs and then it's "Let the children come up front," and the children would come up and get down on their knees and they would have a prop and do some deal. And some little kid would say something ridiculous and everybody would laugh. Then they would march them out to do the childreny stuff away from grown-up worship or what we just liked to call "big church." They would leave and we would stay and do big church, and that was the pastor's or teacher's time with just the kids, not talking to the adults but talking to the children. That's not happening here. This is not Jesus on His knee playing with the children going, "Oh, such is the kingdom of God." He, surrounded by children, is looking at the adults saying, "If you do not receive the kingdom like this, you will not enter in." This is a massive statement that we've got to figure out because we're not children. I'm not a child. I'll be 35 next week. I bought a minivan last week. Any bit of youthful angst that was in me died on that day. I just wanted to confess to you. I want clean hands before you. I broke down and did it.

In this moment, He is saying that we've got to come to Him like children come to Him. So what we've got to do as adults here is figure out how children receive things. And we've got to answer that not in any type of sociological type of way. We can't just watch children and go, "Oh, that's how." We've got to let the Bible define this for us. We've got to let the Bible tell us how to inherit the kingdom like children. And to do that, here's what I think we have to do. I think we have to look at what the Bible says our natural state is and then come back and answer this question. I think you'll get a better gist of what I'm talking about as we go.

As humanity, what are we like separated from the God who created us? What is life like apart from Jesus Christ? This is what the Bible has to say about those. In Romans 6:20, the Bible says that you and I before Christ were slaves to sin. So apart from Jesus Christ, apart from knowing Him, apart from a relationship with Him, you and I are slaves to sin. If sin is preferring creation to the Creator, if sin is believing that our way is better than God's in regards to how we live our lives and if sin is failing to acknowledge that He is the Author, Perfecter, Driver, Creator, Sustainer of all things, it's easy to see how you can become a slave to one of those patterns of thinking.

Let me give you an example. Creation is limited by time. Regardless of what bit of creation has fascinated you, whether that's the natural order or the trinkets we create from the natural order, whatever bit of awe that is stirred in you by creation, is limited by time. Once you get used to whatever it is that is intoxicating you at the moment, that intoxication will dwindle, it will wane, it will disappear and whatever it was in the creative order that at one time stirred up your affections will betray you and leave you wanting something new, wanting something more. It's limited by time, by your experience in it. So the examples I gave you when we were walking through the book of Ecclesiastes is when you get a new thing, that new thing is just a beautiful, amazing, intoxicating thing until it's not new anymore. And it doesn't take long for it to not be new anymore. Another example we've given historically is this. We've had to go out to San Diego several times the last couple of years for work. Every time we're out there, we're just blown away it, and no one else seems to pick up on it. Like we're down in La Jolla, looking out at the water, looking at the seals, feeling the air, looking at the mountains, looking at this dark blue water, but it does not appear that anyone else around us is doing that. They're going to work, they're picking up their kids, they're going for a run. They're doing everything we do here, and they're not drinking in any bit of what we're drinking in. Why? It's new to us, but it's not new to them. The time that they have spent there has made them immune to the beauty that they're around. This is what I mean when I say creation has a limit. So if we're following this thought, you'll become a slave to that. You'll always need something new, you'll always need some new place to go, you'll always need some new city to live in, you'll always need some new toy. You become a slave to the creative order.

The second thing would be that we believe that our way is better than God's. This is probably the predominant way that we find ourselves in slavery. We're limited by our own knowledge and our own scope of what history is about and what's actually going on. So we make decisions based on a limited scope that creates problems because it's not how God created the thing to be, we're not a part of what God's doing, not a part of God's plan. So we make decisions based on our limited scope, and that creates problems. So then we solve those problems based on our limited scope, which creates more problems. And then we solve those problems based on our limited scope. And without this giant, God-like view what history is, you'll be forced into to your own choices and your own decisions all the days of your life. And then I won't talk about the last one except to say that I've never met a narcissist who has a good, healthy family and just a good grip on what life is all about. I've never known them to have good friends, I've never known them to be happy people.

So apart from Him, we're slaves to sin. The second thing is in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that talks about nonbelievers. It says, "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." So not only apart from Christ are we slaves to sin, but He takes it a step further and says apart from Christ, we are blind to the glory that is the gospel. The gospel is silly to us who are

outside of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is going to say this over and over again in a bunch of different ways that the cross becomes a stumbling block, what we believe is the stench of death to some, it just is silly. They are blinded by the God of this world, they think that the gospel relationship with God being restored through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a silly thing. If you think about it, it gets mocked all the time. Just think about shows like Bill Maher, think about those guys who mock it all the time, think of people who are indifferent to it. They think it's silly. This is the mind of people being blinded to the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's not glorious to them, it's not good news to them, they're blind to it. And so since that can't be the answer for them, they're forced to look for answers in other places, which leads us back up to being slaves to sin. So apart from Jesus Christ we're slaves; apart from Jesus Christ we're blind.

And this is going to sound redundant, but it's not. Psalm 82 says, "They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness;" Apart from Jesus Christ, not only are we slaves and blind, but the Scriptures are very clear that we walk in darkness. Let me try to unpack that. It means that we live our life without a guide. So we take what is good, right and beautiful and misuse it so that it is no longer right and beautiful, but it becomes perverse and deadly. I think the big example from our culture is sex. Sex was given to us by God for pleasure, for procreation and for intimacy. Without a guide, being slaves to sin, blind and walking in darkness, we will instead take sex and make it about lust and self-gratification. Food was given to us by God for sustenance and for joyful, feast-like celebrations, just a celebration of how good God is. Celebratory feasts, that is what food was given to us for. Instead, it becomes gluttony and a coping mechanism. This is life without a guide. Was given to us to show that there is something better than money. Instead, it becomes what defines us. I could go on. This is life without a guide. Food is a good thing, sex is a good thing, money is a good thing, relationships are a good thing, husbands and wives are a good thing, children are a good thing, but without a guide, those things become perverse. And this is what the Scriptures are saying. Apart from Jesus Christ, not only are we slaves and blind, but because of that slavery and blindness, we walk in darkness.

I'll do two more. Ephesians 2:1 says that you and I "were dead in the trespasses and sins." So apart from the cross of Jesus Christ, we are dead in our trespasses and our transgressions. We cannot make right what's gone wrong. So I think there's this weird kind of hybrid Christian religion thing that happens where the testimonies that you hear are "I used to be bad, and now I'm not bad anymore." And so people are trying to be good to pay off what's bad. It just doesn't work that way. You can't pay off crime. You can't do enough time to make the crime go away. So the Scriptures say apart from Christ, apart from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, you are dead and you cannot fix the gap between you and God. You cannot have right standing before God Almighty without Jesus Christ. So apart from Jesus Christ, we're dead in our transgressions.

In John 15:5 He says this, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." So he says, "Apart from Me, you're slaves, apart from Me you're blind, apart from Me you walk in darkness, apart from Me you're dead in your trespasses and sins and apart from Me you can do nothing." Now He doesn't mean that you can't do anything, because you can. You can get married, you can have children, you can have money, you can buy a house, you can give money to the poor, you can live an altruistic life, you can do those things. What He's saying here is that nothing of eternal significance, nothing that's going to survive this transient, temporary sixty to eighty years that you have, none of those things are going to survive. So the only things that live on after you are those things rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything else burns. And I'm not saying hellfire, damnation where everything falls from the skies and burns everything up. I'm saying that nothing that you did, no good, right act lives on into eternity with you apart from Jesus Christ. You can do nothing, nothing of eternal significance outside of Jesus Christ. So the Bible says that you and I outside of Jesus Christ are blind slaves who walk in darkness, are under a death sentence and can't do anything about it. That's a pretty bleak picture of humanity, huh?

So let me tell you why this is a video service. On Friday, we will have given birth. And by "we" I mean Lauren. My job is to encourage her from afar, run in ice chips when beckoned and then just keep my mouth closed and hope to survive. That's my game. Lord willing everything will have gone as we've asked God for it to go. And you are watching this video because on Friday at some point, we gave birth to our third child, Nora Chandler. So while you're watching this, I'm at home with my six year old, three year old and newborn daughter. And I haven't seen her yet, but I've had two children and I know how she's coming out...helpless, blind, powerless, in need of saving, in need of defining, in need of protecting and in need of providing. That's how she's coming to us. She is not coming out of the womb and going over to the kitchen to get herself something to eat. That's not how it works. She's not coming out and arguing with us. She is completely desperate for salvation or she gets death. If we do not provide it, if someone who is not blind, if someone who can move or walk, if someone does not intervene and provide, she's dead.

How do we receive the kingdom of God like a child? By feeling the weight of our desperation to be saved, to be forgiven, to be healed, to be provided for, to be cared for, to be protected. That's how we receive the kingdom like a child. We come open-handed, filled with glee, trusting that the triune God of the universe will do these things. We come to Him to save us. We can't save ourselves. We're completely dependent on Him to save us. We come to Him to define us. And I know some people might be just a little more progressive in thinking and go, "You don't define your children." You absolutely define your children. I'll give you a perfect example of how you define them when they're little. Let me tell you what has never happened to me. I've gone to the mall a couple of times with Lauren. I always try to get out of it, but every once in a while I'm there. At the mall they have the pity seats. That's what I call the benches that sit outside of the shops for the husbands while their wives are shopping. And so I've sat in one of those pity seats, and no one ever came up to me and went, "Aw, where are your parents? Where are they? Where are your folks? Are you okay?" No one ever did that. I'd be like, "I don't know. They're old. There around here somewhere. Have you seen them? If someone's lost, it ain't me. It's my folks. If you find them, bring them back to me." No one has ever done that to me. Because at some point, I'm no longer defined by my parents. But I guarantee you if I take my three year old boy, put him on the pity bench and leave, within moments, someone's going to notice him and they're going to start looking around for his parents. Because he's been defined by age, by station, by place in life that he needs either me or his mother to go, "He's mine. He's a Chandler. He's a part of this family." to define him. So we come to God for salvation and for definition. He defines me. I am His, just like my son in the mall becomes a part of the Chandler family. We become defined by Him. We are saved by, defined by, protected by, provided for by our God. And we come in glad submission to the need for all of that.

So how does that contrast us to the world around us? As disciples of Jesus Christ, followers of Jesus Christ, our careers should not define us or save us. They should not bring us purpose. We get that from our God, not our job. As followers of Jesus Christ, neither does our marriage define us, neither does our children, neither does how much stuff we have or don't have. You see, those things don't define us, don't make us or break us. In fact, we see all those things through the lenses of belonging completely to him and finding our purpose, finding our salvation, finding our protection, finding our provision completely in Him.

And if we're really going to do business here and really going to think through this, I think a lot of us need to repent of some things. Because a lot of us aren't seeing through the lenses of childlike faith. We're more seen through the complex lenses of an adult faith that wants to bargain, that wants to deal, that wants to go, "Never mind. I'll just do it. You're handling it too slowly. You're not doing it like I want You to do it." So instead of coming to Him childlike going, "I trust You. What do the Scriptures say is obedience here?" instead, we say, "No, I'll handle it. I'll do it. I'll get it. I'll make this happen," and we're coming to Him like adults. It's almost like we're saying, "I'll do some of what You want me to do, You leave me alone and that will be good." That's more adult/adolescent stuff than childlike faith that just says, "You know what? My marriage is difficult, but I'm doing things Your way and I'm finding my strength, my purpose, my provision in You and not in this relationship."

So remember when we launched out on this idea about what Christianity is and what it's not. One of the defining marks of a disciple of Jesus Christ is how we see the world functioning, how we see life working, what we see the meaning of life to be. One of the defining marks is that our eyes, with childlike faith locked in to the King of Glory, our hope, faith, trust, desire is completely in Him so that regardless of what happens in this list of things down here, we're sustained, we're comforted and we've put our hope here. So apart from Christ we're slaves; in Christ we're free. Apart from Christ we're blind; in Christ we see. Apart from Christ we're walking in darkness; in Christ we're walking in the light. Apart from Christ we're dead in our transgressions; in Christ we're made alive. Apart from Christ we can do nothing; in Christ we are empowered to walk in the fullness of life. How do we get here and away from here? Like children.

So since I've had two kids before, apparently for the next eight years there's going to be a lot of crying that goes on. So apparently if we don't get the bottle there quick enough, there's going to be some crying involved. If she sits in her dirty diaper a little too long, there's going to be crying involved. If she's uncomfortable or hurting, there's going to be crying involved. That scream, as cute as it is for the first 24 hours, is just this really beautiful, primal example of how we're to come to the King of Glory. "Help me. I can't do anything about this. I'm hungry. Help me. I hurt. Help me. I'm dirty. Help me. I don't know where to go. Help me. I don't know how to fix this. Help me. I'm scared. Help me. I'm trusting in this, this and this and it's not working. Help me." How do you receive the kingdom of God? Like a child.

Let's pray. "O Holy Spirit, You know the depths of our hearts, You know where we are trusting in things besides You, You know where we're being defined by things other than You. Some of us are defined by what type of husband, what type of wife, what type of mother or what type of man we are. Some of us are choosing to be defined by things we own. We're choosing to be defined by weird things. We're defined as being fit, we're defined as being rich, we're defined as the guy who can get it done. There's just a thousand silly things we choose to be defined by rather than letting You be our definition.

I am a son, an adopted son of the King of Glory. That's who I am. I'm His. I belong to this family. That's who I am. And so forgive us for that. And some of us have taken our protection into our own hands. We have driven by fear and, with a lack of trusting You, have let our minds, hearts and thoughts of our day constantly go to the worst case scenario. And maybe right now there's some legitimate things to be afraid of, and we just need to lay them at Your feet. So help us come to You like Children, like mere infants, helpless but wanting. I thank You that the disciple has the mantra of 'Christ alone' and enters the kingdom like a child. So at the Village, may the mantra get louder and the children increase. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."