

Hello. My name is Michael Snetzer, and I serve here as the recovery and reconciliation pastor. We're going to start off this morning in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul here is recalling a conversation he had with Jesus. He had pleaded with Jesus three times to remove this thorn, this messenger of Satan that plagues him. And Jesus' response in verse 9 is this, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So I guess the answer there was, "No, I won't remove it, but My grace will be enough to carry you through." Paul's response as he is writing to the church in Corinth is, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

I'd like to get honest with you and tell you a little bit about me and the journey that God has brought me on over the last six months in order to lead me to this day. First of all, I wouldn't consider myself a preacher. In fact, the word "preaching" itself has a tendency to provoke a lot of anxiety in me, and I've wrestled with why that is. Obviously this is a much bigger stage, this is a much bigger event, but I think in part it's simple things. Like I don't have anything to hide behind up here. I don't have a white board up here that honestly hides some of my weaknesses. And so I've just listed some of these weaknesses, and I'm going to read them to you just so you know exactly what you're getting this morning. First of all, I'm not a great communicator. My wife can attest to that. I have no formal training, no seminary training to be a pastor or a preacher. I am not quick-witted or clever. If you want quick-witted or clever, you'll have to talk to one of my two brothers. They got the gift of clever; they are hilarious. I am somewhat slow in both thought and speech. I know this because many of the people I run around with tend to finish my sentences for me after long, awkward pauses. I have kind of a quirky sense of humor, meaning I'm typically the only one laughing at the things I find funny. I'm socially awkward at times, I'm easily distracted and sometimes I randomly lose my train of thought. So I just thought you should know what you're getting as far as I'm concerned. But I still think we're okay. The reason I think we're okay is because I think what we need is more than just a clever message. I believe what we need here to day is for God to move powerfully to reveal Himself, and maybe not in new ways but ways that have always been and always will be.

So let's pray and ask Him to do this. "Father in heaven, we need more than just a good sermon. Lord, as we open up Your Word, we need You to reveal Yourself as we testify to how good You are and how better You are than our way of doing things. I hope today that we might come to the realization that Your way is the only way and it is absolutely the best way. It's in Christ's name that I pray. Amen."

So with all that, you may be wondering, "What in the world is he doing on stage?" Well let me tell you. It's been quite a journey. Last November, I was at a conference in Philadelphia. At this conference, I got up early and did what I like to do, and that is to go running. I got on a treadmill, I put on my iPod and put on some of my favorite music and the adrenaline started to pump. And for those of you who have done this before, there's just this point where you start to experience this sense of freedom. I started to feel this sense of freedom and I had a thought. The thought was this, "Wouldn't it be great to be able to run without fear towards death?" Now before you go call 911, let me explain to you what I'm trying to communicate. It's actually a biblical found in Mark 8:35. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." There's an idea here that is very countercultural, counterintuitive and even counterinstinctual, that my life in Christ requires the end of me and that that is the place that I will find freedom, that really as I hold onto the things of this world, it produces an anxiety in me because those things are temporal. I think anxiety is produced when I pridefully believe that I know what's best for me. And then something begins to interfere with that which I have determined in my own wisdom to be good. So the root of my anxiety tends to be pride.

The context of this verse also seems to be interesting. Jesus here has just plainly told His disciples that He would suffer, die and on the third day be raised. Now that's quite a prophecy considering He was still walking around the earth. Did that happen? It absolutely happened. But then He goes on to say, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Now I don't know about you, but an invitation to crucifixion is an invitation I typically don't accept. But Christ seems to be inviting us into life and freedom.

On December 4th last year, I hit a crisis in my faith. I received an e-mail from our lead pastor, Matt Chandler. I thought it was an e-mail to our entire staff, otherwise I probably wouldn't have opened it. Because typically I'm an avoider, which I'll talk about here in a second. The subject line said this, "Preaching?" So knowing that we had some very good preachers on staff that probably were looking for opportunities to preach, I opened it. Much to my surprise, it was not addressed to the entire staff, but it was addressed to me personally. It was a very simple question, but I had to read it over and over again. What it said was this, "Would you be interested in preaching? One weekend? June 13th and 14th?" And I had to read that over and over and over again trying to understand what it was exactly that he was asking. I kept going up to the address line going, "Surely this could not be to me." Well that one simple e-mail sent me into a very bad place. That evening I found myself in bed, in the fetal position and no one could reach me. I asked the Lord there, "Why are You doing this to me? You know my heart, You know my fears, You know my anxieties. Why are You doing this?" But in the back of my mind I knew, it's because He is a jealous God and a relentless pursuer of my heart. And there just areas of my heart that were not fully His.

So I avoided answering the e-mail for several days, three days as a matter of fact. I'm not sure I would have answered it even after three days, but I ran into Matt at the gym and he said, "Hey, did you get my e-mail?" So I did respond, but I responded with a non-response which was, "I need more time to think about this." And it actually took me a month to make a decision. Thank goodness Matt was patient and gave me that time. But I avoided even answering. And so I started looking at my life and started realizing that I've always been an avoider of difficult things, of fearful things, ever since I was a young boy running off to a far corner of the house and curling up and falling asleep in a clothes hamper. As I look back, my way apart from the Lord, trying to cope as a sinner living in a sinful world is avoiding, escaping. Later that would manifest itself about a seventeen year struggle with drugs and alcohol, which eventually landed me in a drug and alcohol treatment center, which is actually where the Lord found me. I have avoided many things in many ways, often in just not engaging in things I'm not very good at. Maybe you do the same thing. Think about something like dancing. Maybe some of you who are good dancers, you may go dancing a lot. For some of you who aren't good dancers, you probably avoid that like the plague. I'm not a great dancer and I haven't done a lot of dancing.

So now I was being invited into the deep things of God, and was I going to allow fear to keep me from potentially doing what God wanted me to do? So I had to ask, "Lord, is that what You want? Is this Your will for me? Because what this feels like to me is crucifixion. This doesn't feel like life." And then I began to ask myself, "Why is this so intimidating for me?" And I realized that I historically hadn't had much success in the verbal arena. Because in school, I wasn't great with the languages whether it was spelling, reading or any of those things. That compounded with the fact that, particularly as a youth, I have opened my mouth and said some really, really foolish things that led to much humiliation and public ridicule. And for the reasons I mentioned earlier, that I'm somewhat slow and not witty or clever, I feel that I'm somewhat verbally handicapped. Now as young men, we have a tendency to be competitive. Little boys like to wrestle a lot. And for most of us, we grow out of that, not all of us, but most of us grow out of that. But it just moves from that form of competition to intellectual competition to verbal competition. We call it "debating." Well I've historically not been good in that area. So for those of you who aren't competitive, you don't want to compete a guy who can't play. I call it verbal jousting. So if the guy you're fighting, after the first jab, is out and it's over even before the first round is started, it's not fun. And it's definitely not fun for me if, by the time I come up with a comeback, you've already done your victory lap and are already out the building, that's not a good time. . . unless you're a bully and unless you seek out people who are

weaker than you in order to exalt yourself and make yourself feel superior. For me, after getting whipped so many times, I just didn't want to engage. I didn't want to play in that arena. I don't want to experience the shame and the humiliation of that arena.

So it's ironic that I'm being asked now to preach. 1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 26, "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" And so over the course of that month, to make that decision, I wrestled with God, mostly just making excuses. But every excuse that I had, God countered it through His Word. And I wish I had all the time in the world to communicate to you all the wrestle and all that God had to say about that, but suffice it to say, He won.

And the day that that happened, I was in a Bible study with my step-father, and we had just finished breakfast. We were in John 21, so flip there with me. Jesus is in a conversation with another pastor, with Peter. And interestingly enough, it says as it opens, "When they had finished breakfast,..." I had just finished breakfast, and I had been pleading with the Lord over the course of several weeks, "Lord, what is it You want me to do? What about this preaching thing? You know that I love You. What should I do?" "...Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." I was like, "Yes, Lord; I love you. But what about the preaching thing?" "He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." I had my answer, but look what it says next. "'Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me.'"

So once I made the decision, I began to ask Him, "What is it that You want me to say? What should I tell them?" And I just feel very much lead that He wants me to tell you about Him. And if I only get one chance ever to preach, I want to make sure that I get to preach about the greatest love that the world has ever known – the love of Christ to a lost and fallen world. Jesus Himself says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." I'm going to touch on each one of those, but I'm going to primarily focus on Jesus being the way, not a way, not a path, not one of many paths but the way, meaning that there are no other ways. He says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Now what I don't want to do is base this on speculation, and I don't think we have to. Rather than tell you about Jesus being the way, I would like to show you how God has revealed that He is the way. And I would like to do that by using a technique that Jesus Himself used in Luke 24 when He met two men on the road to Emmaus. And speaking to them, beginning Moses, He opened up the Scriptures and showed that they had always been about Him. Even though Jesus' incarnation took place after most of the Bible was written, the whole Old Testament is about Jesus.

And so I would like to do that and go back to what Moses wrote in Genesis and talk about Jesus being the way. We're going to focus primarily on Genesis 3 and 4, but I'm going to catch you up quickly on Genesis 1 and 2. First of all in Genesis 1, we have the triune God of the universe who creates. In John 1, we find out that Jesus was with God, He was one of the three persons of the Trinity when the world was created, when God created the heavens and the earth. And He created in majesty and for glory. And can you imagine when it had only been dark and He said, "Let there be light" and there was light? And God said that what He created was good, and it was good because He said it was good. And

then we find that God created man in His image, that we are image bearers of God. He created him to be in a loving, dependent relationship with his Creator. You see, God created with a rhythm and an order, a way that things worked. And outside of that way, things are dysfunctional. So if man lives outside of a loving, dependent relationship with his Creator, it doesn't matter how much money, possessions or position that he has, he's dysfunctional. We see then that God places him in a garden where He is his provider and protector. He lives in peace, he used to work the garden and God give him instruction. He says, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." He says what man can't do. He begins to lay out His way of doing things. "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." So He causes a deep sleep to fall upon the man, He opens up his side, He removes a rib and brings forth his wife. As Adam awakes, he claims her as his own, to be united with her in the most intimate of relationships, marriage. . .and without shame.

And then we see the close of chapter 2. And then we see the opening of chapter 3. And enter another voice, a different voice, not God's voice but a voice that is seeking to deceive, to lead away from God. And he says, "Did God really say..." He immediately attacks what God said. And then he begins to redefine things. He essentially says, "You can't trust God. He doesn't have your best interests at heart. There's a better way. You can be your own god and it's no big deal. Surely you will not die." And so as the serpent speaks to Eve, rather than taking God's counsel and what God defined as good, Eve uses her own reason and logic and she thought it was good for food, it looked good, it tasted good and it was to be desired to make one wise. Those are three seemingly good things, but what did she forget? What God said. So she determined in her own mind what was good, so she ate. And then Adam was no better. As she followed the voice of the serpent, Adam followed the voice of his wife rather than the voice of God, and he ate. And at that point, the universe was fractured and all that was good is now marred by sin. This is the problem. But God is going to provide a solution.

Now Adam and Eve try to remedy the problem on their own by sewing Fig leaves together. It sounds kind of silly. Your problem is sin and you've got Fig leaves. But it's no more ridiculous than us trying to find value, worth or redemption in our jobs, in the churches we go to, in the people that we marry, the cars that we drive, the haircuts that we have or the clothes that we wear. It's all covering, and it doesn't fix the problem which we're going to see. They then hide from God, they try to avoid God. As a consequence of sin now, we all typically avoid difficult things. But let me tell you, God is real. And whether you believe that He's real or not, He won't be avoided. And He doesn't just leave them hiding behind a bush; He calls out and He says, "Where are you?" He give them an opportunity to be honest by saying, "Where are you at?" And then Adam says, "I hid because I knew that I was naked." Did his covering work? It didn't work; he's still naked. And so God asks him to get honest and they both confess and said they ate. And then God begins to unfold the consequences and then His plan for restoration. In verse 15, it says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Some call this the first gospel. God is saying here that there will me a man born of a woman who will come into the world, who will crush the serpent's head, He will overcome sin, death, Satan, darkness. . .but not without being wounded Himself, as Christ was wounded on the cross. We find out later in Scripture about this man, the He would be born in Bethlehem. We find a little more about this woman, that she would be a virgin. This begins to narrow the field as far as who this man might be.

Some would say that maybe this idea of redemption was a surprise to God, that all of a sudden He had to go, "Oh, what am I going to do here? Man just fell." But I want to show you that this plan for God's glory is interwoven into the fabric of creation. Do you remember the story? Through Adam's wounded side was brought forth his bride. Did you know that the church is considered the bride of Christ and that marriage is considered a picture of Christ and His relationship with the church? So just as though Adam's wounded side is brought forth his bride, through the wounds of Christ, as they pierce His side, the church is born. And as Christ awaits, He claims her as his own to be united in the most intimate of all relationships without shame. Verse 20 of chapter 3 says, "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living." Did you know that the church is the mother of all living? And verse 21, "And the LORD God

made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." God is continually trying to unfold His plan for restoration, His way back. We went away from God, we tried to go our own way, He's providing a way back. We couldn't cover ourselves, but God provided a covering that would require shed blood, a sacrifice of an animal. All pointing to the sacrifice that would come in Jesus Christ as a covering for our sin and shame. And then it says, "He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life." God has made sure that we will not get back there on our own, but many will try.

And we see a picture of that in the story of Cain and Abel. These are Adam and Eve's children. It says, "Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions." You have to remember God's trying to unfold this marvelous and glorious plan. "And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." He's trying to teach His people that it's going to be by faith in the sacrifice that God's going to provide that will be the only way. "So Cain was very angry,..." And I just think about the number of people who will come before the Lord with the works of their own hands. Like Cain would say, "Is this good enough? Is this good enough? Am I good enough?" And the Lord will say, "No. There's one way. It's through the sacrifice that I provide." But God doesn't stop there. He pursues Cain. "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Now we can hear this through two lenses. We can hear this through a religious lens that says, "Okay, I've got to pull myself up by my bootstraps, I've got to try harder, I've got to be a better person." That's religion. But really what this is is an invitation to repentance and to come the way that He has prescribed by faith in the Son of God. He continues, "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." God defines the problem as sin. There is no other remedy for the problem of sin other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith in the Son is always accompanied by action. Faith without works is dead. If it doesn't produce some change, if when the gospel takes root in our heart, it doesn't change the course, the trajectory of our lives, then it's not faith at all. The early church gave themselves to the Way. They were called "the Way," because they were marked by how they lived their lives. They lived no longer for themselves. They were no longer the lord of their own lives, but Christ was. And their lives were marked as different. I think the reason why we don't see that so much in our culture is because it doesn't cost us anything, and as soon as it costs us having to do something we don't want to do, we're out. And we try to define our lives based on what we think and call good rather than what God has said is good and following that in obedience and faith.

So the question for me was: Why would I get up here today in an arena that I just can't compete in? First I had to realize that it's not about me competing horizontally with other people, but it's about me being faithful vertically to what I believe God is calling me to do. I had to realize that God and God alone has defined for me what is good. I would have not defined this as good for me. I would have ended up in a much different place, I can assure you. But now that I'm here, there's no other place that I'd rather be than with a church that I love, with people that I love, telling you about the greatest love the world has ever known. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 says this, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

So practically speaking, I think we stand at the crossroads. At every minute of every day, we choose to follow what seems to be right based on our own speculation or to follow by faith what God has determined to be right. Are we going to determine for ourselves what is good, or are we going to follow what God says is good and be obedient even if it hurts? There's only one way of living, and it's faith in the Son. And I don't know where you're at, but He does. And just like with Adam, He calls and says, "Where are you?" And there's an opportunity here not to avoid, but to get honest with God.

Maybe you have based your whole eternity on what you think is right based on your own speculation rather than what God has revealed.

Let's pray, "Father in heaven, I thank You that from the moment of creation, You had in perfect sight Your plan for redemption. What a glorious thing to exalt the Son. Lord, I pray for those of us who are here this morning that You might reveal at the level of the heart these old truths in new ways. Father, we confess that You are the way, the truth and the life, and that we have no hope apart from You. It's in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen."

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