

Good morning. Okay, I see some of your faces and you're thinking, "This guy is not the guy I was expecting to see." Yes, I have a little bit better tan than Matt Chandler does. I was joking earlier with the audio/visual guys when they were recording last night's sermons. I told them, "Make sure you get those lights up. Because in Denton, if those lights are not up, all they'll see are teeth and eyeballs." Well my name is Adam Thomason, and as you can tell, I try not to take myself too seriously. I am on staff with the Village Church as of June 1st of this year. I'm one of the pastors down at the Dallas campus, and I have the privilege of bringing the Word to you this morning.

So without further ado, let me pray and we'll get started. "Lord, I thank You for this time. It's not arbitrary by any means. You saw this day coming. And so Lord, I pray right now, as some are surprised by who will be presenting the message, that the message would still be the same. That message is that You purchased us by Your blood with the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So Lord, as I stand right here, I pray that the words I speak are not my words but Yours. I pray that You soften the hearts of the men and women here and that we give attention to your word. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Well I'm from Detroit, Michigan, born and raised in the inner-city. One of the things that's hilarious about my life is that I grew up in the stereotypical background. I wore the baggy jeans, Timberland boots, I listened to this type of music and that type of music. Through a series of events, there was a time where God transplanted me to a dude ranch in Northern California. I'm talking bucksaw challenge, straw in the mouth, tight Wranglers, all that. One of the things I had to do that summer in 2005 was I had to lead a team up a mountain. Now the only thing I was used to growing up involving hiking and climbing were fences and hills. So we're standing at the base camp of this mountain.

We started at 8,000ft, the summit is 14,162ft. So you can see that this is not a natural thing for a city boy such as myself. So I went through the training and somehow became certified. We rope up. There's a lead guy with the company, I'm in the back and there were the campers in the middle. So if one goes, we all go. I've got my IBEX on, I've got my Petzl on, I've got my crampons on, I've got my jerky and I've got my Clif Bars. I'm ready. So as we start the climb at 12:00 midnight (that's when we have to start the climb because that's when the snow is the coldest), It's mundane. We're head down, foot over foot. And then a camper turns to me and says, "Adam, is there another way up this mountain?" I said no, so we begin climbing this mountain again. Foot over foot, foot over foot, foot over foot. He looks at me and says, "Adam, this is hard." I said, "Yeah, no kidding." I share that illustration with you because the reality of the Christian life is a statement of that camper. Sometimes we ask that question to the Lord or to our peers. "Is there another way up this mountain of life?" Or we look to the right and we look to the left and we say, "This is indeed hard."

For my type-A note takers that need headings, we're going to be talking about the Harsh Reality of the Christian life. Matthew 7:13-14 says this, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." One of the things that I want to present to you as we are navigating the Scriptures this morning is that the way is indeed hard and the gate is narrow, and that narrow gate is indeed Jesus. There's no other way I can cut it for you. We cannot expand, we cannot broaden the road. It's Jesus, and it's hard. That's the harsh reality - it's Jesus and it's hard.

What I'm going to be building my message around is Galatians 2:20. It says this, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." When we look in Galatians 1, Paul gave them the exhortation, but contextually he was struggling with the Galatians because they were trying to find life and freedom in something other than Jesus. So I have a question for you. Are you here this morning, are you living a lifestyle where you're trying to find life and freedom in something other than Jesus? About the Law, he says the Law cannot justify you. There are no rules and regulations that can justify us. Then the question would be, "Then how do we live?" He says, "You have to die to yourself." That word crucify means, "I was once dead, and I am still dying." Subheading for my type-A note takers - The Harsh Reality of the Dying Christian. Why do I go to that verse? Because I think it's very pivotal that we understand that not only have we died with Christ as He acted upon us through the power of the Holy Spirit but we are constantly dying. We are dying daily as it says in 1 Corinthians 15:31. If we aren't dying daily, then we are setting ourselves up for fall and failure.

The first harsh reality for the dying Christian is that it's hard but necessary for Scripture to be supreme. Now I say this in the context that we are making it about Jesus, we're walking in the power of the Holy Spirit and we're not being the Bible thumpers. The dying Christian takes Scripture seriously. In Psalm 119, the psalmist starts off saying, "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me! How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."

Ezra 7:9-10 says, "For the good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." It's not enough to study the Word, but you have to do it too. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." Let me ask you a question. If someone were to ask you anything, any subject from marriage to sports to finances to raising children to reconciliation to relationships to sex and love, would you be able to take them to the Scriptures and say, "The Bible has an answer for that." Because if 2 Timothy 3 is correct and all Scripture is profitable for teaching, correcting, reproof and training in righteousness, then we, as those who name the name of Jesus Christ and say that we are passionate about His death, burial and resurrection, we should be passionate about the Scriptures because our call is to proclaim His excellencies when He snatched us out of darkness. That is our call. And we cannot do that outside of the Scriptures.

Let me say it like this. The influence of our culture is what we call the Post-Modern influence. "Post" means after and with "modern" think structure. So when it was the Modern Era, it was structured. Black is black, white is white, up is up, down is down, left is left, right is right, etc. In the Post-Modern Movement, they said "What if we started to reappraise these things that everyone said was objective truth? What if black really wasn't black? What if black was white and we just call it black/white? What if brown is red and we just call it brown/red?" And then as we moved through the 20th century in 1970, the last thing that went was religion. And then they started to ask the question, "What if Jesus really wasn't God? What if Scripture didn't have the answer?" And so we started to outsource all these things to the world, and now we have is a society of Christianity that sees the culture as the foundation and the Bible as the accent. So you hear more people quoting Oprah or Dr. Phil than they do the Bible. You have more people stuck on People magazine and caught up in the lives of Angelina Jolie than they are with Ester and Ruth. You have more people concerned about Matt

Damon being the sexiest man instead of Paul being the most crucified man, next to Jesus. So we started outsourcing all these things, and one of the major world views is through what's called Neo-Romanticism, which means that truth is defined by a spiritual searching of my soul and what makes me happy. That is from the Post-Modern movement. And what Christ is saying in Matthew 7:13-14 is, "No, this is indeed hard, and I don't promise you happiness. I promise you Me. When it's all said and done, the treasure that will not rust, that will not fade away is stored up for you in heaven, and you get that when I return. But it's not going to be easy." So the serious dying Christian takes the Scriptures very seriously. It is their guiding tool. It is their heartbeat. As Tommy LaSorda said about the L.A. Dodgers, "If you cut me, I bleed Dodger blue," if I cut you, you should bleed Scripture.

The second harsh reality for the serious Christian is they take their sin very seriously. They are very aware of their sin. I'll give you another illustration. When I was at that dude ranch, I was a river guide. Now not only did I not hike growing up but the only water that I saw was out of the faucet and while taking a shower. So the fact that I had to guide people down the river was nothing but a miracle if we made it down. So through river guide training, we had to do many things, but one of the things we did to relax was make a fire. When the fire would die down and the white coals would glare, they would take a piece of wood, snatch it out of the fire and put it in their hands. It was kind of like their version of hot potato. So they would shake it, blow on it to make it a little bit hotter, and when they couldn't take it because it was burning their hands too much, they would pass it to the next person. So I'm thinking in my head, "This might be the dumbest game I've ever seen." But everybody was doing it, so I'm thinking, "Well, maybe I'm missing something." So sure enough it gets around to me. The guy before me gets it, shakes it in his hands, blows on it and then throws it in the air...and I dropped it. And the guy asked me, "Adam, why didn't you catch it?" I was like, "First of all, it's stupid. Secondly, I know the purpose of fire is to burn." And when I think of that illustration, the parallel is this. The purpose of sin is to burn you. But how many of you believe that the purpose of our flesh being aroused is for us to be burned? Let me give it to you like this. Romans 13:14 says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Why does that matter? That matters because you need to understand that everyone in this room, we may struggle with things differently but what the Bible is saying that we all have flesh and we all have the same desires, whether they are more aroused in one person or more aroused in the other. We all have the same desires when it comes to eating. We all have to eat. And outside of the Bible, if we're not rooted in the Scriptures and we don't see Jesus for who He is, it can turn to gluttony. We all have the desire to be needed or the desire to be longed for or the desire to be in fellowship. But outside of the Bible, it can turn into idolatry of another or it can turn into self-pity or it can turn into arrogance. All of us have that desire. We all have the desire to be pursued or to be romanced. And outside of the Bible, that can turn into an idol as well. So don't see fleshly desires in that verse in the context of the love of money or lust for pornography. It can be the person who takes pride in his academia. And outside of the Bible, he sees himself as a person who's clever in speech, but the Bible clearly speaks against that and says, "I did not use the wisdom of this world. If I did, they would not crucify the Savior." So we all have these desires. If you're looking at this magazine, if you're watching TV, if you're on the internet, if you're around certain people, the Bible is saying, "Stop making provisions for your flesh to be aroused that will lead you into temptation resulting in sin." One of the things I love about that illustration is that the guys would always say, "We love playing this game because we think we can handle it." And one of the things that grieves my heart right now in Christendom is when I hear someone say, "I can handle this situation" or "I can handle being around this temptation." I grieve because when I hear someone say that and they say they have a walk with the Lord, I feel that Satan has them right where he wants them. Because the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." And if you don't take heed, you will fall.

Why does being serious about sin even matter? It matters because if we're making provision for our flesh, we have to understand that it's taking the focus and attention off of Jesus and it's putting it on this side battle. When the war is going on, we have a lot of Christians out there that can be paralyzed for the gospel. It's not a matter of "You need to be

aware of your sin, you bad Christian;" it's a matter of, "I plead for you because there is more out there than these side battles and side struggles. The Lord has more for us." As C.S. Lewis says, we are "like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea."

The hard reality is that to learn Scripture is very tough, to separate ourselves and make no provision for the flesh is very tough, but it's more than worth it. In the Beatitudes, it says this, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." That's either in this time or the next time. It says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." It says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." One of the things that I'm starting to grow more and more comfortable with is being the person who stands for truth and is not really that concerned with the witty "I'm in the culture" type guy. And let me challenge you with that thought because I know a lot of us may think that you do these things or watch these things in order to stay involved with the culture or to be in the culture so I'm not socially awkward. But let me ask you this question. When was the last time you used whatever you were involved in to share your faith and lead someone to the Lord? I've talked to many men and women in the faith and we have these conversations, and I'm like, "Okay, so you're using that for the Lord, huh? So give me a story." Can you go, "Because I was watching *The Bachelorette*, I saw somebody on the train and I went, 'Hey, you watch *The Bachelorette*? Me too. Well let me show you how that leads to Jesus.'"? Or maybe it's "I was reading an article in *People Magazine* and was like, 'Can you believe that Angelina Jolie just has twins? Oh my goodness, there was somebody else in the Bible who had twins. Let me tell you how that leads to Jesus.'" And the reality is that we do these things because they are things that we want. We want to be gratified and don't even have God and the glory of Jesus Christ in the back of our mind. And when we're consumed with those things, our the road starts to become wide. And the Bible says that way is easy. It's easy to be given away to those things. It's very easy to fall into the things of the culture.

Growing up in Detroit, I fought a lot. I was a fighter. There was this one time where my mom said, "I'm going to send you to juvenile because that's where you're going to end up." She was a probation officer, so I took her seriously on that. There was this one week where I got into eleven fights and got eleven pink slips in a span of five days. So fast forward and go back to the ranch, and there was a guy from the higher society who had a sarcastic mouth. He just talked bad to everybody. And in my head I'm thinking, "Lord, I'm just going to have to punch this guy in the nose." I didn't mean maliciously. We had a thing growing up where we said, "Some people need to be beat up for their own benefit." There are some guys you can tell have never had a whopping before. So I was thinking, "Lord, just let me hit him in the nose. I know I would get sent home, but I think this would be the best thing for his sanctification." But that would have been the easy thing to do. It would have been the natural thing to do to react to my flesh when something aroused it. Some of you want to know how that story ended. No I didn't end up hitting him in the nose. When I prayed and said, "Lord, if the guy doesn't calm down, somebody is getting sent home," he ended up coming to me and a lot of other people and just apologized and said, "I realize my tongue and that I'm not a guy that's easily engaged. So I thank you for being patient with me." I was like, "Yes, I'm patient with you. I've been praying for you." But I understand that it's easy to get into the flesh and the things of this culture and it says the hard way is the way that leads to life and freedom. And Jesus is that narrow way.

The last point that I want to stall out on is the sonship of Jesus Christ. The hard reality is that the way of Jesus is very narrow and those who are dying daily and crucifying themselves realize that Jesus is narrow and they do not have a problem with that. Let me share with you a story. About two weeks ago, through my friend I had the privilege of sharing the gospel down in Vickery Park. It's not a rich neighborhood. It's very poor from the standards of Dallas. And these are where all the refugees from Sudan, Iraq, Nepal and Asia come. I had just gotten out of this movie called *Hurt Locker*, and it really challenged me in my faith to go hard after the Lord. So my friend sent me a text right after, and so I'm just

ready. I'm saying, "The next person I see is going to get the gospel. I'm not going to be tactful, I'm not going to come from the back door, I'm just going to run up to them and say, 'Do you know Jesus loves you?'" So he sent me a text that says, "Going to lunch with two Iraqi guys. Does anybody want in?" So I send him back, "YES, I WANT IN." So we're in the conversation and it comes to Jesus and I ask the guy directly, "What do you think about Jesus?" He says, "I believe in Jesus." I go, "Really? What faith are you of?" He says, "I'm a Muslim." I go, "Really? You believe in Jesus?" He says, "Yes." Normally when I share my faith, I'll play what I call the "baby joker." This is kind of my set-up card and set-up verse. I say, "John 14:6, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' What do you think about that?" He says, "Well, I believe in that?" I'm like, "Really? Well how would you explain that verse?" He says, "I explain it because Jesus came to the Jews. So that verse means that he is the way, the truth and the life to the Jews." And so I'm thinking in my head, "That was very slick and smooth. I'm going to have to come with a bigger gun on this next one." And so I was like, "Are you familiar with Musa (that's Moses in their language)?" And he said, "Yes." "Are you familiar with the Egyptian story?" He goes, "Yes." "Okay, so when Moses goes, 'Who shall I tell them sent me?,' what was His response?" He goes, "God's response was, 'Tell them that I am sent you.'" I asked him, "What does that mean?" He says, "It means that 'I am, I was and I always will be the Eternal God.'" I say, "Okay, that's good. Now fast forward to and let's go to John 8. Do you think that Jesus ever claims to be God?" He says, "No, Jesus never claims to be God. Jesus can't be God and he never claims to be God." I go, "Well let's look at John 8." And so we looked at John 8, and there you'll find that it talks about how David ate the bread and really had no regard for the rules, but at the same time David, who the Pharisees honored, longed to see the day of Christ. And the Pharisees say, "Are you not more than fifty?" And Jesus responds, "Before Abraham was, I am." And I asked him, "What do you think that 'I am' stands for in the text?" He says, "I was, I am and I always will be." And I said, "Let me ask you again. Does Jesus claim to be God?" He says, "Yes." "Do you believe in that Jesus?" He says, "No." Now you may see that as harsh and you may see that as big bad Adam trying to nail someone down in an argument to the fact that they don't believe in Jesus. Well let me tell you the redemption of that story. That guy goes from "Jesus could never be God" to "I don't even know if your scriptures are true" to "If this is true about Jesus and what you say about him being the Son of God and being God, can you show me in this Bible what I need to read in order to attain this?" And so I walk him to the first eight chapters of John and say, "Just read these first eight chapters of John and next week we'll get together and talk about it." The Holy Spirit convicted him so much in those first eight chapters on that same day that Drew Trends gets to share the gospel with him some more.

The seriousness of Jesus is not about winning an argument when it comes to me; it's about "This is the God/man who loved delivered Himself up for me." You need a clear picture of who He is. As A.W. Tozer says in his book, "If we do not give people a clear picture of who Jesus is, then they will not realize the despair and the weight that they are under and they will see no need for a Savior." The dying Christian takes Jesus seriously. And with this Post-modern movement, I see it in the media, it's like no one wants to be the clinical, narrow-minded thinker. But I'm taking a stand to be the narrow-minded Christian when it comes to Jesus. Why? Because the road is indeed narrow as the Scriptures say. The gate is narrow, and that gate is Jesus Christ. Everybody is trying to redefine Jesus. It's the Jesus for you or the Jesus me. And I could have taken a back seat to the fact that he said he believed in Jesus. I could have went home and said, "Well at least we talked about Jesus. Don't I feel good about myself?" But the Lord said, "No Adam, you press." In this culture where Jesus is being redefined, just like any other term is being redefined, you need to make sure when they say Jesus that they're talking about the one who was born of a virgin, who lived a perfect life, who stood as a silent lamb, looked Pilate in the face and said, "You have no power over Me but what is given to you from on high. No one takes my life; I lay it down." And then He goes to the cross innocent, He takes upon the wrath, He raises from the dead and He stands as the first one among all creation. And I love it because there's a contrast. If you look when Jesus rose from the dead, He said these very things to the disciples. Before He died, He said, "I no longer call you slave; I call you friend." And that's what everybody wants, for Jesus to be their friend. But guess what He said when He rose from the dead. He stood and looked at them in the face and said, "All authority of heaven and earth has been given to Me." And He told them, "I am your friend, but don't forget that I am Lord." And in this culture, we need to be about making it clear to people, "Yes, He's your

friend, but don't forget He's Lord." And if you do not have a relationship with Christ, when you perish, you will die, you will see Him face to face, you will confess Him as Lord, but you will not be in the presence of Him when it's all said and done as friend, fellowshiping with the saints.

One last thing and then I'll close. Leading up to Matthew 7:13-14 is very interesting because in Matthew 4, Jesus was tempted; and then after that, He calls His first disciples; and towards the back end of that it says He did His ministry throughout all of Galilee and healed people who were demon possessed and had all these sicknesses; He preached in all these synagogues and it says that a great multitude had followed Him. Why does that matter? Because at this time, He had a select group of disciples, and because of the great things that He did, a great multitude started to follow Him. He looks back and He sees over ten thousand people at least following Him. So we fast forward to chapter 5 and we see the Beatitudes and he closes in seven. During this time, if you parallel it to John 6, He says something to this crowd that I think is very pivotal. He says, "I know that you are following me because of the things that I do." That's my interpretation. The Scriptures say, "Unless you eat of My flesh and drink of My blood..." In other words, "Unless you believe in this death, burial and resurrection and you believe that only the blood can make you clean, you have no fellowship with Me. You cannot be My disciple." And just how He said the road is narrow and the way hard that leads to life, guess why many turn back according to the Scriptures. Because this teaching was hard. Why do I say that? I say that because you can be a curious, involved, learner of Christ and not be a committed, serious disciple of Christ. And when it's all said and done, later in that chapter it says many will knock on the door and He will say, "I do not know you."

My prayer is that we move from curiosity to commitment and that we realize the harsh realities that this road that leads to life is indeed hard. And I pray that we realize that it takes dying daily to ourselves, to our feelings, to our ideologies, to this world. We've got to take the Scriptures seriously, see our sin seriously and see the Savior seriously.

Let's pray. "Lord, I thank You for this time. Right now if there's anyone who says that the Holy Spirit is tugging on their heart, Lord, I just ask You to lead them up front to where people are set up to pray with them. Lord, I thank You that this day is not by happenstance. Lord, I thank You that Your word is indeed true and that it does not return void. Lord, I pray that this seed was planted on fertile soil to produce fruit, whether that's fruit in the lives of those who need a relationship with Christ or whether that's fruit in the lives of those who say they have a relationship with Christ but they haven't been as serious as the Bible says. Lord, I pray that people will set it in their hearts to study the Word of the Lord, to do it and to proclaim it in all of the land. I pray that they take the name of Jesus Christ seriously. I pray that they see Scripture as a heartbeat through the walking and the power of the Holy Spirit. And I pray that they see that Satan is not playing, that he seeks to corrupt us. I pray that they make the most of this time because the day is indeed evil. Lord, I thank You for this privilege and opportunity to present Your Word. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen."