

To be real honest with you, I'm not a big fan of Valentine's Day. It's not because I don't love love. I very much love love. But I think our culture has no idea what it's celebrating. It has no real clear definition of "love." If you'll pay attention to our culture, our definition of love can't be defined outside of self-seeking or "what makes me happy. . .how does it work for me. . ." So that's a really lame, weird thing to celebrate. If the idea is that love is this kind of emotional, stirring, mysterious thing that can attack you from out of nowhere, that is so powerful that you can't control it, that's a dangerous, terrifying idea. It's not to be celebrated, honestly. So for those of you romantics who think it should, let me just say this. Right now, I'm very much in love with Lauren. But let's say I go to the store tonight to buy a bag of chips and the baby angel in the diaper with a weapon pops me in the back, and now all of a sudden I see this other lady and now she's the beautiful one, she's the one that I love. That's a terrifying idea and not one that I think should be celebrated.

So I'd like to read a passage out of Song of Solomon 8, starting in verse 6. "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love [ahava] is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised."

I have been with Lauren for 12 years, and we've been married for 10 years. There have been these moments in our marriage and in our relationship where I thought, "This is a really cool moment." And few of those have anything to do with some hyper-emotional, romantic, violins in the background, good glass of wine, beautiful scenery. Few of them revolve around that. Honestly, they tend to be a lot more painful than that. I'll give you an example from this morning. Our seven-month-old is extremely selfish. I don't know if you've ever had one of these things, but she's decided to cut all four of her top teeth last night. So there was not a lot of sleep happening at the Chandler household last night. But when they do radiation, specifically in your brain, you only lose hair where they shoot the radiation. So I've got this real weird head thing where this is bald but then this still grows hair. And I can grow hair like a Chia Pet. I could strain right now and make it grow. I didn't shave before I went to bed last night, so I had to get up this morning and shave. And there are part of my head that I can't see or reach. So at about 6:45 this morning, despite the fact that we didn't sleep much last night, I'm waking up Lauren. I'm like, "Hey Boo, I need you to shave the back of my head." To which her response was, "They can't see the back of your head." So I was like, "I know they can't see the back of my head, but this can't happen. You're going to have to get up." So Lauren comes into the bathroom exhausted and shaves the back of my head so I could be pretty for you. Now, that's ahava. That's a love of the will. That's not, "Oh isn't this romantic? I get to get up with my sick husband at 6:45 in the morning after only getting a couple hours of sleep and shave his radiated head." But that's ahava. That's love. That is a foundational, deep, full of guts, "I'm not going anywhere" love. That's to be celebrated. If we could celebrate that, then I'd be all about Valentine's Day. But that's not what our culture is celebrating. It's so much more emotive, so much more silly, so much more hollow, so much more "I like you today. Let's celebrate that." So I'm not a fan. That's the mini sermon. Now let's get to Colossians.

Colossians 1, we're going to pick it up in verse 15. My next three sermons all revolve around Jesus Christ. For the record, they all should. You should always hold me accountable for that. But specifically in verses 15-20, you've got three things that are happening. We'll talk about the first one this weekend, which is Christ held up as preeminent and the Lord of all creation. Next week, we'll come back and talk about Christ being eternal, which means He has always been. Christ is not a part of the creative order. And then we'll come back around and talk about Christ being the fullness of deity. So

here we go, Colossians 1, starting in verse 15, "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, . . ." Okay, I'm going to stop here. This is great news. When it comes to God, if you want to know who God is, if you want to know what He's like, if you want to know what His tone is, how He behaves, how He feels, how He responds, you don't have to speculate, you don't have to play children's games; you can find out. You study, you look at and you watch Jesus Christ. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. This little half sentence alone could be an entire series. You could just follow the life of Christ and go, "This is what you can learn about the nature and character of God by watching Christ." I'm going to point out just three.

The first one is we know that God is merciful. We know that God is merciful because we watch Jesus over and over again extending mercy to those who are clearly guilty. I'll give you three examples of that. In John 8 we see the woman caught in adultery who is dragged into the temple while Jesus is teaching one morning and thrown at the feet of Jesus Christ. They say to Him, "The Law of Moses says that we should stone such a woman. What do You say?" So the Bible starts giving us all these strange details that a lot of people speculate on. I'm not going to speculate on it. The Bible says He bends down and begins to draw in the dirt. No one knows what He drew in the dirt. There are all sorts of things. There are some people who say He drew their sins in the dirt. He could have drawn a picture of a pony. I have no idea what He drew in the dirt. But He draws in the dirt and He says, "Let the one of you who is without sin cast the first stone." And then He goes back to drawing in the dirt. Then the Bible says that from the oldest to the youngest, they began to drop their rocks and they leave. And He picks up the woman's face and says, "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" And she says, "No, my Lord." And He says, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." The thing that is so weighty to this text is the fact that she is guilty. She is caught in the act and the Law condemns her. It's not as though there is any question of her guilt. She is caught in the act, the Law is clear and Jesus extends mercy in the face of blatant guilt. So what we learn about the Father by watching the Son is that the Father is merciful. He not only does this to individuals; He does it at times to whole cities. In Luke 13, He's looking over Jerusalem, and He says, "O Jerusalem, how I long to gather you to Myself." He's saying, "How I long to reconcile you. How I long to walk with you. But you kill the prophets I send to you, and you stone the messengers I send." So He's saying, "I'm trying to reconcile with you, Jerusalem. Every time I try, you turn into a scoffer and a mocker." And so He weeps. And it's not weep, fire falls from the sky and kills everybody. It's not like a weeping rage. He weeps over Jerusalem because they scoff and they refuse to be reconciled. This is a far cry from the God in the heavens that we get this picture painted of so often with a lightning bolt in hand just waiting to blow up anybody who refuses to obey. You're going to see over and over and over again God extending mercy to those who are clearly guilty.

And then the one I like to use because everyone knows it even if you don't have a church background is the story of Zacchaeus, the wee little man. You've got this great story of Zacchaeus, who honestly is about as much of a scum bag as you could be. He is raising taxes for Rome, who is occupying Jerusalem at this time and killing and oppressing hundreds of thousands. They're being funded by guys like Zacchaeus who raise money for them via taxes. So Zacchaeus climbs up in the tree and Jesus walks up through the crowd to the tree and says, "Zacchaeus, you come down. For I'm going to your house today." So Zacchaeus comes down, they go to his house and eat dinner at his house, they talk gospel, they talk reconciliation, they the things of God and Zacchaeus repents and not only gives back everything that he had taken but even beyond what he had taken. And Jesus says, "Surely salvation has come to this house." So over and over and over again, in the face of blatant guilt, blatant shame, blatant disregard for the things of God, Jesus' response to that is mercy. So what we know about God, what we know about the Father is that He's quick to extend to those who ask for it, those who desire it, those who want it. We see that because those who receive Jesus receive it. So the first thing is mercy.

We also see that God is compassionate. And we see it in an interesting story that's honestly quite complex. In John 11, Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, has gotten really ill and is close to death. Jesus' response to the disciples was, "This is not the kind of illness that leads to death, but rather the kind of illness that was given for the glory of God," which is an interesting, complex idea. And so Jesus stays two more days and teaches. Finally

He heads out on a two day journey to check on Lazarus, and as He gets close, Martha meets Him before He gets to the village and goes, "Where have You been? Lazarus is dead." He's not just dead; he's buried in the ground. And she's sobbing and weeping. So Jesus talks with her, and then they go on into the village. Now Mary, hearing that Jesus is coming, gets up and leaves her house full of mourners, and they think she is heading to the tomb, so they follow her out. She goes to Jesus and not to the tomb, so Jesus is met by this mob who is crying and sobbing and screaming. And Mary comes up to Him and asks Him the same thing. "Where have You been? If You would have been here, he wouldn't have died." And then He goes, "Take me to the tomb." So they go to the tomb, and this mass of humanity is all wailing and sobbing and crying all the way to the tomb. Now why is Jesus going to the tomb? To raise him from the dead, right? Do you think at this point that Jesus has not decided He's going to do that? No. He's already said, "This sickness is not going to end in death. It was given so that I might be glorified." So Jesus knows He's going to raise him from the dead. And so He's walking with all these people who are mourning and sad and overwhelmed and broken and hurting and don't see the light at the end of the tunnel. And then this really interesting thing happens. It's the shortest verse in the Bible. What happens? Jesus starts to cry. The Bible says that He's hurt, that He feels heavy and He begins to weep. Now, here's where I think it's complex but also very beautiful. Jesus knows He's about to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knows He's about to start a party like that city has never seen. Lazarus has been dead for four days. That's a lot different than pulling someone back after 12 minutes. Four days in the ground is a lot different than CPR. So He knows what He's about to do, but that doesn't stop Him from entering into the grief of His people. We know that God is compassionate because, although Jesus knows He's about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He still is moved in compassion towards those who are experiencing loss, towards those who are mourning, towards those who are hurting. He doesn't use the illustration of the stained-glass window going, "Guys, up close it's real jagged and looks like broken glass, but once you get far enough back, it's going to look beautiful." He doesn't try to explain those things. He just starts weeping with them. And then He raises Lazarus from the dead and they celebrate. So we know that God is compassionate by watching the compassion of Jesus as He sees His people hurt.

The third aspect of God we can see through Jesus is that He's all powerful, He's omnipotent. And we see this over and over and over again. Most people have already guessed this about God, but you're really going to see it in different stages with Jesus. Some of my favorites are in Luke 8:22-25 when Jesus stops the storm. The disciples and Jesus are on a boat on the lake when the Bible says a wind storm kicks up. The disciples are terrified; they're crying because the boat is filling with water and it's being thrown all over the lake. They just know they're going to die. Jesus, at the time, is taking a nap, which is just cool. I don't know how else to say it except that it's just cool that He's saying, "I'm not worried about it." So they argue over which one of them is going to go wake Him up. I will speculate on this one. I'm guessing it's Peter. I just can't see a debate going long without Peter going, "I got it." So he goes and wakes up Jesus saying, "Surely we're going to die here. Get up." So Jesus gets up, yawns a little bit, looks around and then just rebukes the storm and it stops. The wind and the waves just stop. And then Jesus goes back and lays down while the disciples head to the other side of the boat and they have this talk, "Who is this guy that the wind and the rain and the waves obey Him?" So you're watching God's power over nature, over weather, over creation in Jesus Christ.

You can see it over disease in Luke 17 where ten lepers stumble onto Jesus. Leprosy would always be a horrible disease to have regardless of time period, but in this time period in particular, it was viewed socially where you could be thrown out of the city, where you would be viewed as unclean and dirty and not allowed into the temple and not allowed in any type of community activity. You really would have been excluded from any type of gathering of anyone who didn't also have leprosy. It would have just been torture on the soul. Jesus runs into ten lepers, they kind of talk for a while and then leave. After they leave, Jesus heals all ten of them. Only one comes back and falls at the feet of Jesus to worship Him, and Jesus goes, "Were not all ten healed? And yet only the one comes back?" I want to say this because it's been interesting since the AP article has come out. I have tried to figure out in the last ten years why people who don't believe in God are so hostile towards the idea of there being a God. I kind of joke and say the two tenets of atheism are: 1) There

is not God and 2) I hate Him. So in a lot of conversations and in a lot of dialogue, I've tried to get to the bottom of that. Because I have never grown furious about unicorns, ever. I have never seen someone driving their car with a fairy on the back and thought, "It's people like that who are destroying the world. Wars are started because of fairies." It's a weird thing, all this pent up animosity towards something you don't think exists. Yet you get a little insight into the one leper returning. If you'll dial into this you'll see it all the time. It's just a visible picture of our hypocrisy. If anything goes well for us, we did it, we accomplished it and we made it happen. But if anything goes wrong, God did it or did not do it (depending on how we want to spin it). And that shows you our bent towards evil and our bent towards hypocrisy. If it's good and right and if we've got money and things are well, we did it, we accomplished it, we cracked the code. If we get sick or something goes bad, it's, "How dare God not do this. How dare God let this happen." And this is what you see happening here when you get ten of them healed and only one returns. But for the record, Jesus is showing His (and God's) power over disease.

I'll give you a couple more. In Mark 5:38-42, a ruler of the synagogue (definitely not a friend of Jesus' and would have been hostile toward the message of Jesus Christ) has a 12-year-old daughter who gets sick, and so he sends a runner to Jesus and says, "My daughter is really, really sick." And so Jesus goes to his house, and as He gets there, the little girl had died. So everyone is mourning in the house. So He walks in and goes, "She's not dead; she's just sleeping." And they mock Him. So Jesus clears the house, walks into her bedroom, sits on the edge of her bed and says, "Talitha cumi [little girl, arise]." And she sits up and eats. He raises the little girl from the dead. So you've got His power over nature, you've got His power over disease and you've got His power over death. You'll see that power over death again and again. You saw it with Lazarus, and you see it in His own resurrection. You'll see it over and over again in the New Testament moving into the Acts of the Apostles.

And in Mark 5, Jesus once again gets out of the boat on the other side of the lake and He's met by a man filled with demons. The Bible tells us that this man could not be bound. It didn't matter what they tried to bind him with, he could not be bound. It also says that he constantly wept and cut himself. So this guy is about as mentally and spiritually dark as you could imagine. If your normal state is sobbing and cutting into yourself with glass and rocks, it's a pretty dark spot. So this is what Jesus walks into. Now, when Jesus walks out, this man runs up to Him and falls on the ground and the demons begin to speak. Now listen to what they say. "Jesus, have You come to destroy us?" So always keep in mind that the dualism of Hollywood isn't how the Bible portrays this big battle between good and evil. It's not like this is how many troops the devil has and this is how many troops God has and let's hope God wins. That's how it's played out in movies. The battle of Armageddon is very different in the Bible than it's been portrayed in most places. The enemies of God gather in the valley and Jesus shows up. And He's much different from the white, effeminate Jesus you commonly see. No, He's got a tattoo on His arm, a sword coming out of His mouth and fire coming out of His eyes, and He says, "I AM," and the enemies of God are consumed. It's the quickest battle in history, I believe. "I AM," that's how it ends. So the demon-filled man comes up and says, "Jesus, have You come here to destroy us?" And Jesus goes, "Tell Me your name." "Legion, for we are many." And then the demons don't start go, "Let's do this. Let's fight." Rather they go, "Don't destroy us. How about You put us into those pigs?" There are like 2,000 pigs grazing right there we find out. So Jesus says okay, and He sends them into the pigs. The pigs go and run off the cliff. Do you remember this story? And for the record, the demons in the New Testament are really the only ones that ever get it right when it comes to who Jesus is. Jesus asks the disciples, "What's the word on the street? Who do people say that I am?" And the disciples are like, "Well, some say that You're Elijah. Others say that You're John the Baptist." In other words, "You're a ghost reincarnated." And then He asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Now Peter nails it, right? "You're the Christ. You're the Messiah. You're the Son of God." Now the reason I don't give him credit right out is because Jesus calls him the devil six verses later. So regardless of what encouragement you get, if Jesus then puts it in reverse and calls you the devil, I think some of your cred just got taken away. Nobody ever gets it right except the demons. The demons are like, "Oh, Holy One of God. Have

You come here to destroy us?" Over and over again, the demons are going to nail it when it comes to who Jesus is. So you're going to watch His power of the demonic.

Now, Hebrews 1:3 says this, "[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Now this really isn't saying a lot different from what Colossians 1 is saying. He's saying that Jesus Christ is the exact imprint of the nature and glory of God, which means if you want to know who God is, if you want to know what God's like, if you want to know how He'll respond to you, if you want to know what His tone is, if you want to know what stirs up anger in Him, where He extends mercy, you have to look at the person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know who God is, Jesus is the key. Now there are hints in other places. There are hints in creation, there are hints in your conscience and other places. But to know the nature and character of God, you go to Jesus Christ. If you go anywhere else, you're going to get off. We know about the nature and character of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. So I want to plead with you to always be in the Gospels, to always be studying and looking at the life of Christ. And you need to look at it carefully, not just read it. Put yourself in the story. Like think about what's actually happening when they drag the woman caught in adultery and throw her at the feet of Jesus. Is she crying? She thinks she's about to die. She thinks that day ends with the lover escaping scot-free and her being pelted with rocks, publicly naked until she dies. It's a horrible way to go. That's her reality. And what does she get? Mercy. She gets mercy. Zacchaeus, he just wants to see Jesus. He doesn't want Jesus to see him. He shimmied up into a sycamore tree. Jesus just talking to Zacchaeus made the whole city enraged. Zacchaeus doesn't want to be seen by Jesus; he just wants to see Jesus. If you'll put yourself in the story, you'll begin to feel the weight of Jesus' grace and love. That will give you insight into the Father. Now this is so important because we've talked about this the past couple of weeks. We are transformed from one degree of glory to the next by beholding God. How do you behold God? Jesus. So that makes Jesus an unbelievable key through His life, His work, how He responds to things, how He does things, where He goes, what He says, to us knowing and being transformed by the power of the gospel.

Now let's get back into Colossians 1. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Now, this does not mean that Jesus was the first thing created or that God and the Holy Spirit were standing around having this conversation when the Holy Spirit said, "You know what would be less confusing? If there were three of Us. So let's create a third." "Well, what did You have in mind?" "I was thinking Son." "Ah, it's kind of cliché, but let's do it." Jesus is not a part of the creative order. In fact this term "first born" is used 130 times in the Septuagint and it's almost always used to describe status or power. So in Exodus 4:22, Israel is called, "My beloved firstborn son." So the point is not that Jesus was the first thing created; the point is Jesus is prominent over all things created. He has authority. So you could go outside today and scream, "Stop snowing!" and it wouldn't stop snowing. No one in here has ever raised anybody from the dead after four days. Now some of you docs might have pulled someone back after six minutes or something, but no one has ever pulled someone out of the ground after four days. We could go back through this list, and see that no one has been able to exhibit the type of authority and power over creation that Christ did. Because He is the firstborn over everything that is. So Jesus is not a part of the creative order. He has always been, He will always be and He is pre-existent, but that's an entire sermon next weekend.

Let's keep going. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." Now that's a little jab at Caesar. Here's why. Marcus Aurelius wrote in Meditations, "O Nature: from thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee all things return." Paul here is saying, "That's close, Caesar, but there's something above creation. Creation is not actually ultimate, but creation serves something higher, and that something is Jesus Christ." So he says a couple of things about Christ here. One is that He is the Creator of all things. And then he defines all things in two ways: on earth and visible and then in heaven and invisible. If you can touch it, taste

it, see it, smell it, if you can experience it in any way, Jesus created it. It is my earnest hope that you will see through lenses that aren't sacred/secular but that you would be able to see the beauty and reality of Jesus everywhere and not just in these things over here but not these things. So it's my hope that we would be able to do away with this sacred/secular divide and that we would just be able to Him. So if it exists, Jesus created it. Often it was created in a good form, but now it's been perverted by the Fall. So we talk about how wine can be viewed in this way. Wine is not intrinsically evil or intrinsically wicked. The Bible actually celebrates wine over and over again. Can that lead to sinful things? Absolutely. Should that be considered with a great deal of wisdom? Absolutely. Can you begin to proclaim that the Bible teaches complete abstinence when it comes to alcohol? Not with any kind of biblical fidelity. What was Jesus' first miracle? And you can do that thing where you just basically get really silly. Like you can go, "Well wine was different back then and you couldn't get drunk off of it. It was more like grape juice." Then why does Ephesians say, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery?" As if grape juice will make a brother blow a room up. There's nothing like a bunch of grape juice to make me want to set fire to something and take off all my clothes and go running through the streets. If we could just be at some level intellectually honest, it would help everybody. So wine is that way, sex is that way. You can take anything in the creative order can be used for good and be beautiful and be a reflection of the person of Christ. It can also be twisted, perverted and destroyed. So this is what this is saying. If it exists, Jesus was there. He created all things.

But then he moves into this one that I've always been intrigued by. Not only did He create everything on earth and everything visible, but He also created everything in heaven and invisible. One of the things this is speaking of peaking of is angelic powers. And people make two errors when it comes to spiritual forces. They either make way too much of them or they don't consider them enough. Those are the two big errors. Like if you've been around hyper-spiritual people, if anything went well, it's because the angel took care of them or if anything went bad for them, it's because the demon didn't want them to get to Bible study so they got a flat tire. I always go, "I thought it was because you ran over that nail? Maybe it was demonic, but maybe you just need to clean your garage. So you've got people who want to go one of two ways. The truth in Scripture is they're real. There really are angels and there really are demons. There really are spiritual authorities and spiritual powers. All were created by Christ and they all also obey Him. That's what we find out in this text and in the Hebrews 1 text.

And here's the second part of the invisible creation. It also means that God designed the world to work a certain way. These are invisible realities that He wove into the world. For instance, you can't breathe underwater. You can if you can put the tank on, you can if science helps us do that, but God designed you to need oxygen to breathe. There is a certain way to plant and harvest barley. You can find that out in the book of Isaiah actually. God designed the world to function in a certain way. These are invisible realities that are just the laws of the universe, and the Bible says He created those also.

Now Paul is going to get into this idea of syncretism, and I'll unpack that because I think we need to hear it well here. Syncretism is the idea of borrowing from different religions, different spiritual ideas and adding it to yours and creating this new one. That's what's starting to happen when he's outlining these ideas. ". . . whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." As Rome built all these roads and you started getting this melting pot of cultures, you had this idea of syncretism where a guy would say, "Jesus is my number one. I love Jesus. He's who I'm following." But then he would have this Druid neighbor who loved his wife well. And so he would start to pick up on some Druid practices and go, "I'm going to add that to my Jesus. I really like Jesus, but I'm going to add this to Him." And then he would have this spiritual mystic Jewish friend and he would go, "Man, my mystic Jewish friend prays so much better than I am, so I'm going to take this and add it to Jesus. Jesus is still my number one, but I'm going to add this and this." Syncretism is this collision of different ideas where they're going, "Yes Jesus, but. . ." and then they would add to it. That's what Paul is addressing and attacking here. He's going, "Why would you do that? In all of those things, if there's truth there, it's truth that serves the purposes of Christ. Why would you go to what is secondary instead of to what is primary?" I'll unpack how I think that works in Dallas. It's a rare thing for people

to say in Dallas, "I'm a Muslim Christian." I haven't seen a lot of that. But you will see is a lot of New Age stuff meshing in with Christianity that usually comes in different forms. So good church people go to church, probably don't know their Bible very well, probably don't know the gospel well, and then all of a sudden they'll meet a real "spiritual" friend who maybe does tarot cards or maybe does yoga or maybe does meditation. And now all of a sudden, we've got this whole new world of meditation opened up to us and now meditation is this new kind of play thing, despite the fact that the Scriptures are filled with the command to meditate. Eastern meditation, in one way, is about emptying your mind. Gospel meditation is about filling your mind. Eastern meditation promises that if you empty your mind, you'll be free. The Scriptures say that if you fill your mind with truth, you'll be free. So that's how it works its way in, and so you get this New Age mysticism wrapped up into Christianity in Dallas, Texas. And Paul here is going, "Why? I don't understand. Thrones and rulers and powers and authorities all work for Him and move us towards Him. Why would you take those things and make them more than they are? Why would you elevate them beyond what they are? Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him." And really the idea in between those two ideas is that everything is moving towards him. So it's this idea that you and I are on these immovable train tracks that we can't get off, and we're heading towards Jesus Christ and He's heading towards us. And there's this collision coming.

Now, what's the fruit of believing all of this? I think it's three-fold. If this is true, then the commands of God in the Bible should be celebrated like David celebrates them in the Psalms. I mean, I've read the commands of God in the Scriptures, but honestly I've never laid in bed at night and thought them to be honey on my lips. I have not laid in bed at night and just thought, "Oh I just want to think about Your commands, the thing that You command me to do. I just want to meditate on them. You know what? I'm not sleeping tonight. I'm just thinking about You Law." That has been a rare occurrence in my life. But the reason David talks like that is because David tapped in really early that if Jesus is the Author and Perfecter, the Creator of all things, then His commands are about lining us up with how He designed it to work. So the commands of God are about Him tapping us into life, not taking life from us. So if God says, "This is how sex works," He's not trying to take from you; He's trying to lead you into something. If He says, "This is how marriage works. . . This is how you should walk in your marriage," He's trying to lead you into how marriage was designed to be. Now I'm not saying that the commands of God are easy. I would never say that to you. I've tried to be obedient to them. I have a sinful, wicked old man in me that still wars against those things. So I'm not saying they're easy. I'm just saying you can delight in them because Jesus is about leading you into life. So if His commands, whether they be about your children, your money or your time, those things are about Jesus lining you up with how He designed it. And I'm going to say that to you over and over again for the next 30 years. So if you're already tired of it, I don't know what to tell you.

The second bit of fruit if this is true is we should be more serious about our spiritual lives than we are. I have great, robust dialogue with my good friend in Manhattan and a good friend of mine in Seattle (two more secular cities than Dallas) about who has the harder job, them or me. And I have argued for years that I have the more difficult job here in the Bible Belt. Because we're such mutts here, and there's no denominational loyalty in the Bible Belt. We grew up Lutheran, then we went to a Charismatic church, then we went to a Bible church and then we finally ended up at the Village Church, which we just found out last week is Baptist, so we don't know if we're staying. So think about the mesh of theology that is. Think about the mesh of backgrounds. This group thinks that baptism saves you, this group thinks if you don't speak in tongues you're not saved, this group thinks if you don't memorize a book of the Bible a year you're not saved. In the end, you have this big mutt, and that's extremely difficult. Now the rise of secularism in the southern states complicates it, because we have the same secularism that Manhattan and Seattle do. It's just here in Dallas now, and it collides with a brittle fundamentalism that confuses everybody. They still won't concede, but I have argued that it is harder for me down here than in Manhattan and Seattle. They still won't concede, but it's not like them to anyhow and

it's not like me to, so it will probably just be an argument we won't solve until we get to heaven. Anyway, they're being faithful and I'm trying to be, and so we'll see what the Lord wants to do.

In the end, people aren't very serious about their faith here. Most of them are good church goers, but they're not serious about their faith. I'll give you a perfect example. Our parking has been just a nightmare, specifically in the morning services here at Flower Mound. We need people to take the shuttles, and it's just not happening. One of our friendliest shuttle drivers said to a man, "Hey, would you mind parking here?" And he said, "F\*\*\* you. I'll park wherever I want." So I was like, "Tow him. Call somebody in Tyler, Texas and tow him. I can get you a number. Tow his raggedy little car out to Longview and give him a card and say, "This is where your car is." Because unlike Christ, I am not fully sanctified and merciful, especially if you're a grown man cussing out a 23 year old teacher who is just trying to get you in the door. This is a perfect example of the silliness that is Bible Belt Christianity. You have some sort of knowledge that God loves you, but there's no real pursuit of Him, no real understanding of the Scriptures. So if this is true, then we should be much more serious about our faith, much more serious about holiness and much more serious about pressing into Him than we are. And I haven't been able to figure out the disconnect, but we will tow you to Tyler.

Now, here's the last bit of fruit in believing this. I think meeting felt needs is important. I really do. If your marriage is a wreck, it's not a bad thing to not want your marriage to be a wreck. That's not a bad thing. If you struggle in cycles of addiction and things like that, it's not a bad thing to want out of those cycles. If you really struggle with bitterness, rage or unforgiveness, it's a good thing to want those things to be gone. But if you make any of those things ultimate, you begin to chase the wind. If you go, "My ultimate goal is to fix my marriage. . .my ultimate goal is to get out of this addiction. . .my ultimate goal is to stop this behavior. . .my ultimate goal is to \_\_\_\_\_," if you make anything like that your ultimate goal, you begin to chase the wind. I believe you begin to get yourself in a cycle that you'll never get out of where you will try to white-knuckle your behavior and get stressed out, weak or angry and you'll give in.

So here is where the gospel and religion shear away from one another. Because religions says, "Forgive your brother, feed the poor and be a better person, then you and God can talk." The gospel says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It's not, "Clean up, then come," but rather, "Come when you're tired and come when you're weary. Come now, and I will give you rest. Come to Me." So behavioral modification occurs when Jesus becomes ultimate, when Jesus is what we're after. So I want my marriage to be good. I want it to be right, I want it to be deep. So I'm going in going, "What do I need to know about Jesus and the Father? How can I get to know Him, walk in His grace, walk in His mercy, see it, feel it, know it and understand it in such a way that it begins to affect how I see my wife, how I see my children and how I see my money?" That's how this works. And that's where people begin to get confused and trade what is free and beautiful and life-giving for just new chains.

Because even if you were good enough to master it, no one likes you. So if you got all your Sunday school pens, if you memorized all the text and you smoked everybody in Awana's Bible drill, if you were that guy who is just the consummate church kid, more than likely you are a pompous, arrogant person that most people don't want to be around. So when your name comes up, eyes roll. If you haven't been transformed by the gospel and all you have are just religious accomplishments to hang your hat on, you're probably not well liked. And part of me knows enough to know that you're going, "Not me. I'm not that guy." Okay, but maybe you are. The chances are if you live that way, no one would tell you anyway, because you probably use the Bible to beat up people and bully them. It's really not hard. Most people don't know their Bible very well. So you shouldn't get that much credit for that. But I think this is the big fruit of believing this. By making Jesus our ultimate, by making Jesus our pursuit, we are invited in.

I've said this before, and I'll continue to say it. God is not in love with some future version of you. Do you understand that? I know you've heard me say it, but I want you to hear it and understand it. In fact, my prayer this afternoon was that

you would hear me say it. He's not in love with some future version of you. You're not in time-out right now. He's not like, "One day, you and I will get together and chat, but for now, to be honest with you, you bother Me. So four or five years from now, we're going to be tight, but right now you've just got way too many issues to be in My throne room." That's now how this works. He says, "Come to Me now, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We come as we are, and we come now.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for the opportunity to really open up Your Word and have it read us a little bit. I know that there are those of us in there that, if we go back and look through this, we are guilty, we have been scoffers, we have been arrogant, we have lacked compassion and on and on we could go. So I thank You that in You we see Jesus and that the Father is able to extend. We thank You that You are a God of compassion. Some of us come in here heavy tonight, some of us come in here mourning with loss tonight, and we thank You that You're not outside of time just telling us to get it, but that the book of Hebrews tells us that we have a high priest in Jesus that is empathetic towards our struggles, empathetic towards our difficulties and empathetic towards our hurts. So we thank You for that. We thank You for Your power over the weather, we thank You for Your power over disease, we thank You for Your power over death and we thank You for Your power over dark spiritual forces. We love You, and we need You. It is our earnest confession that we are easily distracted and, if we had to be honest, a lot of us are focused on something other than You. So forgive us of that. Reset our eyes on You. Teach us what it looks like to treasure You above all, teach us what it looks like to pursue You above all and grow us in a knowledge and understanding of You. We love You, and we need You. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."