

I want to speak this morning on “Seven Ways of Pleasing Jesus.” Sorry, I’m just not mature enough to resist a moment like that. If you’re God’s child, if in fact you have been saved by His grace, if you consider yourself a believer in Jesus Christ, there is one thing you need to know, that God hasn’t chosen any of His children to be just consumers of the faith. This isn’t Our Holy Church of Macy’s where I shop around and I’m looking for a place that feels comfortable for me, and if I like the music and I can tolerate the preacher, I’ll stay, but the minute something goes on that I don’t like, I’m down the road again. I have a me-centered, passivistic way of dealing with the faith. No, no, no, it’s God’s intention that all of His children not only are witness to the amazing, gracious, glorious, loving, transforming work of His kingdom, but that all of His children would be participants in the work of His kingdom. I realize that as He comes to me, He forgives me, He welcomes me into His family, He also takes ownership over me, ownership over everything in my life. My life does not belong to me anymore. I belong to the Lord. All of my gifts, all of my strengths, all of my talents, all of my resources, everything is His for His use. That’s the radical change in my life. I’m not a consumer of neat spiritual things while I hold on to my life, I hold on to my abilities, I hold on to my talents and occasionally I step out of my little safe life into this thing called spirituality. No, no, no. That means that you need to understand that it’s not really the job of the church to schedule ministries for you. Because it’s not like you step out of your life into ministry and are involved in ministry for a moment only to step back out of ministry into your life. No, it’s God’s intention that ministry would become your life. It’s God’s intention that every dimension of human life is at once a forum for ministry. Relationship is ministry. Work is ministry. Leisure is ministry. Parenting is ministry. Marriage is ministry. Those are all forums for ministry.

Now having said that, it’s important to ask the question: How does God craft faith in us, so as we embrace Him by faith and we live by faith, we then become useful tools in His hands? How does He craft faith in us? How does He work to prepare us for this life now, not lived for our little kingdoms, but lived for His kingdom? How does He do that? Well I want to leave that question out there for you and make an observation that may not seem like it connects, but trust me it will later. Here it is. There is a significant, even profound difference between amazement and faith.

I live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where my kids grew up. And we live about an hour from the Jersey Shore. So like many Philadelphia families, we would take vacation week down at the Jersey Shore. We would go to Ocean City, New Jersey with our children, hang out on the beach and pick up medical waste. I just told my children those were seashells. They have the weirdest collection of seashells. We would hang out at Ocean City because it was a nice family place, but the next community down the beach was Wildwood, New Jersey. Wildwood has a huge boardwalk, and on that boardwalk are three big amusement parks. Our children would always beg us to go to the amusement parks and we would always have a night at Wildwood. Well in one of those amusement parks, there is a ride that is essentially this big metal frame. From it hangs these huge elastic bands. At the base of it is a big pouch that they belt a human being into, and they pull this thing back and launch this willing but delusional human being into the night. And they fly back and forth. It’s the kind of ride that you would tweet somebody and say, “I rode this ride, paid \$7 and almost died!” Now that ride amazes me. The first time I saw it, I my mouth was agape. My family realized I wasn’t with them and when they came back, I was still just standing there in awe. Now that ride amazes me, but you will not strap Paul Tripp into that pouch and launch him over the Atlantic Ocean. It’s not going to happen. There is a significant difference between amazement and faith. You had better recognize that difference. Now I want you to turn to Mark 6. This is an interesting, provocative little vignette in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me tell you what’s happening in the book of Mark coming up to this moment. Jesus has collected a group of followers and called them His disciples. Those men were not

so much meant to be witnesses of the work of the incarnation, Jesus coming to earth; they were meant to be participants in its work. So Jesus is not so much just trying to inform them so they would understand the theology of His coming, so they would just have these big theological brains. No, Jesus was meaning to transform them by His grace so they would become different human beings, men who live in a radically different way. That's what He was doing. So although these guys didn't fully grasp it, they were in the 24/7 school of discipleship. They were being disciplined every moment. The typical way that they were being disciplined is Christ would put them in a moment of difficulty where there was some circumstance or some need that was way beyond their ability, and just when they would about to be confused or despair, He would reveal His glory, the glory of His power, the glory of His compassion, the glory of His grace. It was that combination of difficulty and glory that was meant to change them. Because they weren't just to be informed; they were to be transformed by His grace. There is in Mark a bit of a gospel equation. It's this; Divine Power + Divine Compassion = Everything You Need. That's suitable for your morning mirror. DP + DC = EYN. This is what's going on. There is a God of awesome power, who, because of divine compassion, has invaded my life, and that means He will deliver to me all things that I need. And that thought is meant to propel me, to begin to transform the way I think about my identity and I think about who I am, I think about what I need, I think about how I am meant to live life. Divine Power + Divine Compassion = Everything You Need.

Now let me read for you from Mark 6, beginning with verse 45. "Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

Now check this out. The disciples find themselves in another one of these moments of difficulty. They're trying to cross the Sea of Galilee, they're facing an impossible headwind, they're in the midst of an angry sea, they are unable to get where they're trying to go, according to the time given in the passage they had probably had been rowing for eight hours, they're utterly exhausted, they're utterly frustrated and they're in an impossible, futile and dangerous situation way beyond their ability. Now when you look at that kind of historical moment in Scripture, you should ask yourself the question, "How did these people get into this mess? How is it that these people arrived at this seemingly impossible, clearly futile and potentially dangerous moment?" And look at verse 45. It says, "Immediately [Christ] made his disciples get into the boat." The disciples were not in this moment because they had been unwise, they were not in this moment because they had been unfaithful, they were not in this moment because they had been disobedient and they were not in this moment because they had been self-interested. They were in this moment because they had been commanded to be in this moment. They were in this moment because they were obeying the clear call of Christ. Now this tells you something radical that you need to understand. Jesus wanted them in this moment. This moment was not in the way of His work of transformation. This moment was not outside of that divine power and that divine compassion. This moment was not an obstacle of the good thing that He was trying to do in them. This moment is part of the plan. Jesus knows exactly what He's doing. He knows exactly where they will be. He knows all about the wind and the waves. This is the Lord God Creator. He's not surprised.

When you get that, you have to ask, you have to be authentic and integrity when you read the Bible, you should ask tough questions of the Bible and you should say, "Why? Why would a God of mercy, why would a God of compassion, why would a God of power, why would a God of grace and love ever choose any of His children to be in this kind of moment? I thought God loved me? I thought He was with me? I thought He was the great Deliverer? I don't understand."

Well here's what Jesus knows. He knows the hearts of His disciples and He's seen the empirical evidence of that heart demonstrated before Him. He knows how self-reliant we can be. He knows how secure we are in our strength and our own wisdom. He knows how amazed we are by our own character. He knows that so often we are way too trustful of ourselves. So here's what He will do. God will take us where we have not intended to go in order to produce in us what we could not achieve on our own. We had better begin to teach and encourage and comfort one another with a theology of uncomfortable grace. Because often this side of eternity, God's grace comes to me in uncomfortable forms. Oh I long for the grace of relief and someday that will come, but right now what I actually need is the grace of refinement. I need to be changed. I need to be transformed. I need to become a person of faith. That means everything I do is based on a deep and abiding belief that God is and He's glorious and He's loving and He's kind and He's powerful. And I find hope and rest in Him and Him alone. That's what I need to become. So in love, He will take me beyond my wisdom, beyond my strength, beyond the bounds of my character, beyond my righteousness and He will cause me to throw myself on Him. That's not God forgetting me. That's not God beating me up. That's not God being unfaithful and inattentive. The Bible calls that grace. I'm being rescued, I'm being restored, I'm being loved, I'm being changed. He loves me and He will not turn from His work and He will continue and continue till that work is complete. That's grace. God will take you where you haven't intended to go in order to produce in you what you could not achieve on your own. Those moments of difficulty in the life of a believer are sure signs of redemptive love. That's what they're about.

Now what happens next in this little vignette is just mind-boggling. Look at the middle of verse 48. "And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea." Say what? He did what? Why would He do such a thing? What does this tell us about the person Jesus and what He's seeking to accomplish? You need to ask that question. You need to unpack this moment. Now think with me. Jesus clearly sees and understands the difficulty of the disciples. He sees that they're in trouble, He sees that they're in this discouraging, futile and potentially dangerous moment. If all He wanted to do was relieve the pressure of the moment, all He had to do was pray a prayer from the shore and it would have been over. The sea would calm, the wind would die, things would get happy, they would be able to row the boat to shore and everything is cool. But that's not what He does. While the wind is still powerfully blowing, while the waves are still crashing, while the disciples are still in that futile moment, Jesus, as Lord of creation, walks across the angry sea, walks into the powerful wind, He walks by the disciples. It says He passed by them. It's not that He's ignoring them, but He walks far enough so that all the disciples can see Him. What is He doing? Yes, God is a God of mercy and there are clear moments where, in love, He will deliver you from situations of difficulty, but He wants to do more for you. He's not so much after your situation, He's after you. And He wanted His disciples in this deep, frustrating moment to get something that they could get no other way. So He walks out onto the water so they can see Him, because He wants to demonstrate something that is meant to transform the way they think about themselves and transform the way they think about life.

Now look what it says. It says when they all saw Him walking on the sea, "they all sang a hymn together." Is that how your Bible reads? No, it says, "When they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified." Now these guys have been with Jesus. They had seen incredible miracles. They had watched Him raise a little one from the dead. They saw Him feed this massive crowd with a little boy's lunch. They had seen His glory, they had seen His power, they had experienced His compassion. Why were they utterly unprepared for this moment? Why, in a moment when they should have been heartfelt and peaceful and full of joy, were they terrified? Why were they unprepared? I think what is true of those disciples in that moment is often true of us. Even though we claim to be God's children, in moments of difficulty, we're more skilled at seeing ghosts than we are at seeing our Father and our response is more terror than hope. Why?

As this is all going on, as the sea is angry, as the wind is blowing, as the storm is still going on, as the disciples are terrified, Jesus speaks to them and says, "It is I. Do not be afraid." Now in your English translation, it's hard to get the

sense of what Jesus is doing here. The man Christ Jesus, who is also the Son of God, is in this moment taking a name of God. He says, "Don't you understand? I AM is with you. The God who was and is and will ever be the same, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who has made covenant with you, the God whose covenant is now fulfilled in My person, I AM is with you. You have hope, not because you're wise, not because you're strong, not because life is peaceful. You have hope because I AM is in your life. And now there's hope because of the invasion of My presence. By grace, you are never in a situation alone, you are never in a relationship alone, you are never in life alone. I AM is with you. I AM in glory and in grace has invaded your life. There's hope."

And then Jesus gets in the boat with the disciples. He speaks to the storm and it dies down. And the Bible says that the disciples were utterly amazed. Now that sounds almost like a compliment, but we'll learn in the next verse that it's actually a critique. Now let me explain amazement to you. Amazement is when you have been taken beyond any categories that you have to understand or explain something. The disciples shouldn't have been amazed. They had watched this One operate. They should have been increasingly being transformed by the display of power and compassion that was demonstrated every day in their lives. But they're amazed.

Let me give you sort of a dumb illustration of amazement. Pretend with me that you're outside this building one afternoon and up drives the most amazing European sports car you've ever seen. This thing just has gorgeous lines. It would get you attention even if you're not a car person at all. It's bright yellow and it's about four feet high at its tallest point. And the man who's in the car is more laying down than sitting down and He pulls up, turns off the engine and these gull-wing doors open up and he slides out. And you're just interested in so you say, "Could I just sit in the car for a moment?" And you sit in the car and the inside of it looks more like a jet cockpit than it does an automobile. You slide your way out, stretch your back and you're walking around the car and you say, "I know this might be impolite, but I just can't help ask. How much is this car worth?" And he says, "Well about \$495,000." At that moment, you're impressed. And then he says, "I've got to go." He gets into the car, presses the button, the gull-wing doors come down, he turns on the engine, that 12-cylinder engine roars that deep roar, he puts the car in gear and it levitates out of sight. Now you're amazed. You have no categories for understanding what just went on. You're looking at the guy next to you asking yourself, "Did he see the same thing I saw?"

There is a critical difference between amazement and faith. Amazement is a function of the brain. Faith is an investment of the heart that changes the way that I live. You can be amazed by the preaching of Matt Chandler and not live by faith. You can be amazed at the loving community that is the Village Church and not be living by faith. You can be amazed at all the wonderful Christian music that's now available to us that causes our hearts to worship and not be living by faith. You can be amazed at all the ministries that you can participate here and not be living by faith. You can be amazed by the logic of a theology of Scripture that is so gorgeous and not be living by faith. You can be amazed by the grand redemptive story and not be living by faith. There is a critical difference between amazement and faith. Amazement is something you do with your brain. Faith is an investment of your heart that changes the way you live your life.

Why in this moment was the response of the dear disciples not one of faith? Why was it one of terrified amazement? Well the passage tells us. Mark doesn't make many editorial comment, but he makes one here. He says, "For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." That little phrase "they did not understand about the loaves" refers back to the feeding of the five thousand. In that moment where Jesus takes a little boy's lunch and turns it into a meal for a large crowd, Jesus is demonstrating that He is the bread of life and as the bread of life He will make provision for you that will finally satisfy your heart. And when Mark says they didn't understand the loaves, it's a short-hand for saying they didn't learn their lessons, they weren't learning, they weren't understanding, they weren't gripping a hold of, they weren't living out of this great demonstration that Christ was making for them again and again as He willingly put them in difficulty and willingly showed them His glory so that they would be transformed, so that they

would live out of a new identity and by living out of a new identity, they would realize that they had new potential and would live in radical new ways wherever He would place them. They weren't learning their lessons.

And Mark tells us why. It's because they had a hard heart. It's possible to be a believer in Jesus Christ and have a hard heart. Hebrews 3:12-13 warns believers against a hard heart. Now it's a word picture. The Bible talks about the stony heart. Think about this. What's being described there? Well if I had a rock this big in my hands right now and I would press it with all of my strength, there's no way that I would be able to change the shape of that rock. Because stone isn't malleable. So that picture of a hard heart, that picture of a stony heart is a picture of a heart that is resistant to change. It is actually resistant to this unrelenting, transforming work that Jesus is seeking to do in my life. Now why would I be resistant to change? I think the sweep of Scripture would tell us that I'm typically resistant to change because I'm okay with where I am. I'm okay with what I know, I'm okay with a marriage that is a little bit better than a war zone, I'm okay being a little bit in debt although that debt reveals the materialism in my heart, I'm okay with terminally casual relationships with the body of Christ and although I'm here a lot no one knows me, I'm okay that I'm occasionally greedy, envious and jealous because I don't really steal things from people, I'm okay that I check out women in the mall in ways that I shouldn't because I hadn't really committed physical adultery. I'm okay with where I am.

And why can we be okay? Because of our ability to deceive ourselves. Let me play this out for you. I say this all the time. Whenever I say it, people laugh. You probably will too. No one's more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do. You see, you're in a constant conversation with yourself. And the things that you say to you, about you are very, very important. They are very formative of the way you respond to life. So if you're a believer and you do something that's wrong, your conscience will bother you. That's the beautiful convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. And when your conscience bothers you, you only have one of two possibilities. You will confess that thing as being wrong and you will place yourself once again under the justifying mercies of Christ and receive His forgiveness. Or you will erect some system of self-justification that makes that wrong acceptable to your conscience. We're so good at doing that. So a man who is at the mall lusting will tell himself, "It's not lust. I'm just a man who enjoys beauty." A woman who's on the phone in a long conversation of gossip will end the conversation by saying, "We should pray," and tell herself that that was a very extended and detailed personal prayer request. A parent who has just screamed at one of his children will say, "I wasn't angry. I was just being like one of God's prophets." A man who is on an ugly quest for personal power will say, "I'm just exercising God-given leadership gifts." We get to this point of contentment because we will not face how desperately the reality is of our continuing need for God's forgiveness. So in the face of conviction, we bombard ourselves with self-atoning arguments. Here's what they do. They make us feel okay about things that are not okay. And when you do that, you sit there and you feel like you've arrived. I'm about to hurt your feelings now. There's not a grace graduate in this room.

Paul uses a very interesting term in 2 Corinthians 10 for this dynamic. He talks about the fact that there are these pretenses that get in the way of our knowledge of God. What's a pretense? A pretense is a plausible lie. If I were to say to you that in my early years I was a female Olympic gymnast, that's a lie. But it lacks plausibility. . . I hope. But if I stood outside this building with a beautiful suit, an expensive leather briefcase, some architectural drawings and a little bit of structural vocabulary, I could fool you for a while that I was an architect. Because that lie has some plausibility. So as you tell yourself self-atoning lies, you never tell yourself a bad lie. The reason you're able to do that is because there's always something to point to. You do live in a fallen world that does not operate how it's intended and you do live around flawed people who are messing up. So you have plenty of people and situations to point to, and as you do that, you are convincing yourself that your biggest problems in life are outside of you and not inside of you. And once you convince yourself of that, you quit being excited about transforming grace because frankly you don't think you need it because you've arrived.

You say, "Paul, I sort of get what you're talking about, but help me here." Here are these men who had been chosen by God to be part of the most beautiful thing that you could ever be part of. It's a kingdom that radically changes people. It's a kingdom of grace, love, forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation. And yet as the redeemer has invaded their life to help them begin to place their meaning and purpose, their inner sense of wellbeing, their goal for their living, their rest and hope in His hands, they're okay with where they are, they're hard-hearted men.

Well let me illustrate this with a little bit of a family story. When he was young, our oldest son Justin just didn't understand the concept of gifts. It drove me crazy. We would buy Justin a gift that we thought he would enjoy, he'd rip open the gift, pull it out, discard it and he'd play with the box. It just made me crazy. So after a couple of years of that, Luella and I decided that we would go one Christmas on a quest to find the quintessential Justin gift. We were going to find a gift that this kid would love, that he would enjoy, that he would play with. We were probably out there looking way longer than two rational people should have, but I was going to have us stay out there. We finally found this toy that we thought, "This is a Justin toy. He will love this. He will play with this." When it came to that moment at Christmas for him to open that gift, we were clearly more excited than he would have ever been. He tore into the gift like a little boy would, not thinking of recycling, and he pulled out the toy and actually began to play with it. I had such a feeling of victory. I went into the kitchen for a moment to get something to drink, talked briefly with one of the other members of my family, went back into the living room and he was playing while sitting in the box. Now you say, "Why is this man telling us this cute family story?" You have been given, you have been offered the most awesome gift that could ever be given. It's a gift that's gorgeous from every perspective. You can turn it any way you want, you can walk around it anyway you want and there is nothing but beauty in this gift, stunning beauty. It's the one gift that, whether they know it or not, every human being needs. It's the one gift that has the power to radically change you, to radically change your thoughts, to radically change your desires, to radically change your words, to radically change your actions, reactions and responses. It is the awesome, glorious gift of gifts. It's the gift of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there are many of us who sadly are content to play with the box. We're content with a little theological insight. We're content with a little bit of biblical literacy. We're content with a little bit better marriage, a little bit more insightful parenting. We're content with contributing a little bit of our money to God's work. We're content with the feeding we get on Sunday morning. I am deeply persuaded that the problem with many of us is not dissatisfaction, the problem with many of us is not discontent, but the problem with many of us is we're all too easily satisfied. We don't hunger for more of the work of this gift. We're not holding on to this gift of grace with both hands saying, "I am not going to let go of this gift of grace. I'm going to be wherever it's promoted, wherever it's explained. I want to hang with people who love this gift. I want to hear the teaching of this gift. I want to live in light of this gift. I'm not letting go of this gift of grace until it has done everything it can do in my life. I love this gift of grace. It is my priceless treasure, Jesus and His grace."

Isaiah 55 says that's exactly what God intends to do. He intends to radically transform me. There is in Isaiah 55 this weird little word picture. It's talking about the rain and snow of the word of God coming down, and it says when the rain and snow of God's word comes down, the thorn bush becomes a cyprus and the briar becomes a myrtle. Now that's a weird word picture. If you have a little thorn bush in your backyard and rain comes down on it and nourishes it, what do you expect to get? A bigger thorn bush. When rain comes down on a little briar, you expect to get a bigger briar. But the Bible is saying that, as God works by His grace through His word, I become, at the level of my heart, organically different, I become something else. I don't become a better me; I become, by grace, a radically different me. This is not your best self now. I don't need to be a better me; I need to be delivered from me, I need to be transformed into something different. That means that lustful people become pure people, greedy people become giving people, angry people become peaceful people, controlling people become serving people, anxious people become restful people because I AM has invaded our lives by His grace and He will transform us into something different. You must settle for nothing less. You must not stop along the way. Because I don't know about you, but this week I gave empirical evidence that I am yet in need of further transformation and the work isn't done.

So I want to pastor you for a moment. If I would watch the video of your past couple weeks, would I say that you are celebrating, you are holding on to that gift of grace with both hands, wanting it to do everything that it is able to do in you? Or are you content to play with the box? Are you content with a little bit of faith, a little bit of external Christianity, a couple lumps of change here and there, but you're okay with you? Maybe you're a believer in Jesus Christ, knowledgeable and intentionally and this morning you would say, "Paul, that's me. There are really times when I esteem this gift of grace, when I'm blown away that I AM has invaded my life. In those moments, I long for this grace to transform me. But Paul, there are times when I don't care. I would rather have life be easy and predictable. And in those moments, I don't esteem this gift of grace and I am pretty content with playing with the box." I would say this to you. Don't wallow in shame. Don't be paralyzed by regret. You, because of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, because He has purchased your forgiveness for every sin in the past, present and future, you in your brokenness, with your fickle, rebellious heart, with your lack of care, can run into His presence and be utterly unafraid. Because He will not reject you. He will receive you, and He will forgive you by His grace. He will not only forgive you; He will work change in you. Run to Him. Run to Him this morning.

Maybe you're here and you say, "Paul, if I were honest, I have never exercised that faith. I don't think I've ever believed. I think I've lived a pretty comfortable, self-reliant life. I don't know if I have belief in me." The Bible says that by grace that faith is a gift of God. Run to Him. Run to Him and confess your self-reliance, your independence. And He says if you come to Him, He will never ever turn you away. There is no more stunning reality in the universe than that a holy God would invade the mess of our existence to transform us by His grace. So we get rescued from us and the mess we would make of our lives to live for something grand and glorious, the transforming purposes of His kingdom. If you were honest, would you say, "I love that gift of grace. It is the most valuable, motivating thing in my life"? Or are you content to play with the box?

Let's pray. "Oh Lord, we thank You for the beauty and clarity of this passage of Scripture we looked at. It's like a mirror that we look into and see ourselves. We are so like those disciples. But we thank You for more than that. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the I AM, who would invade our lives by His grace, who would redefine who we are, who would by grace not only forgive us, but give us a new identity and in giving us a new identity, give us a whole new potential. May we be worshipfully dissatisfied until Your grace has done all that it is able to do. We pray this for the sake of Your children. We pray this for the sound of Your glory. We pray this in the sweet and strong name of Jesus. Amen."