

Over the last ten weeks we have set out to answer a rather simple question. What are we doing here? When we gather, when we sing, when we read, when we gather in smaller groups, when we gather in large groups on the weekend, what are we actually doing? So we created a simple statement that we believe held in it all the pieces of what the biblical gospel was as well as the implications of that biblical gospel on a people. So we taught out of that statement, which is pretty simple. We exist, as both individuals and as the church, to bring glory to God by making disciples through gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, gospel-centered service and gospel-centered multiplication. So the gospel is what informs, shapes and empowers all that we do as a community of faith.

When we finished teaching through each one of those sections and explained it more fully, we moved on and talked about salvation, how salvation works, your role in it, God's role in it and the intersection of those two. We talked about baptism, what baptism was and what it wasn't. And then we moved on last week and talked about your uniqueness, that God has uniquely wired and gifted you. But that uniqueness was not given to you for you alone but rather for the building up of Christ's body into the fullness of Christ died to make it.

So what I want to do now to end the series is simply condense all of that into one sermon and preach it. I know some of you type A, linear types are saying, "Why didn't you just do that in August?" My response to that would be that you would not feel the full weight and full brunt of 1 Peter 2 if we had not talked about God's glory, had we not talked about God's call to discipleship and if we had not talked about the difference between worship and gospel-centered worship, community and gospel-centered community and so on. So I want to wrap up our fall together by just doing an overview.

So let's look at 1 Peter 2, starting in verse 1. It will start hard and get beautiful. "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander." I want to tell you a legitimate fear I have for us. My fear is not that we overemphasize the grace and mercy of God. Here's why. Because you can't do it. If God gave me a thousand years and more words than exist, I could not overemphasize forgiveness, mercy and the love of God. I could not do it. There are not enough words and there is not enough time to make much of God's forgiveness and love for the saints through Christ. You cannot overemphasize grace. My concern then is, in our good, right and biblical exaltation of Christ through His grace, mercy and forgiveness, that you would then forget the call on your life to pursue holiness and to take seriously sin against God Almighty. So for those of you who are unbelievers, my fear is that you would come in here, hear what I say about Christ, hear what I say about mercy, hear what I say about forgiveness and then that would somehow justify in your mind your rebellion against God, as if that's fine because that's who God is.

So I want to read you a couple of verses that you're not going to find on a bumper sticker or a coffee cup, and I want to point out a couple of things. Psalm 5:6 says, "You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." Now here's what I want you to notice. Does He say that He abhors bloodthirstiness and deceitfulness? No. He says, "I abhor the bloodthirsty and the deceitful man." So what we want to do is play a game of half-truths (even if you could call it that) where God hates the sin and loves the sinner. But the Bible just said, "I abhor the bloodthirsty." That's a man. He didn't say bloodthirstiness. That's a sin. But it's the man who is bloodthirsty, the man who is deceitful. There is some tinge of truth in the statement that God loves the sinner and hates the sin, but it's not completely accurate.

Let me read you a couple of more. Psalm 11:5 says, "The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence." Proverbs 3:31-32, "Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways, for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence." The grace and mercy of God in Christ is profound, spectacular and beautiful, but it does not make sin safe. It doesn't make sin safe, and it doesn't skirt the issue. So when God says, "Put these things away," He's not talking to you like you guys are boys. "If you have time, why don't you put those things away. Don't worry about it if you can't get to it, but here's what I'd like. I'd like for you to put it away, but I understand that maybe you can't right now or maybe you don't want to right now. So we're cool, but when you get a chance, could you pursue holiness like I died to bring you?"

So some of you might be going, "Chandler, I come here every week and here's what you have said every week I've been here. You've said that the cross of Jesus Christ and the life of Christ has made me in the sight of God righteous, blameless and holy." Now I know we're getting close to November, and so there will be a lot of flip-flop statements going on. I'm not trying to be that guy, because every bit of that is true, right and should be celebrated. But here's what I want you to hear me say, and then I'm going to read you a text. If you, as a believer in Christ, fondle what Christ put to death on the cross, please don't be surprised when He breaks your hand. Please don't be surprised when He breaks your legs when you keep running toward what He came to kill.

So some of you right now are like, "Chandler, I preferred you on chemo. That was nice Chandler." So let me show you Hebrews 12:5-6. "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." Now there are two pieces here, and you've got to think about them separately at some level.

I have three children. There is constant discipline in my house. Very little of it is chastisement. So this word "chastise" is the word "scourge." In our culture, you would translate it into "spank." Now I'm disciplining my three children constantly. "No buddy. This is what we want to do. . . Come here, sweetheart. This is where this goes. . . This is what we want to be before the Lord and before others. . . Just because your friends say that, do you think it's true? Do you think that that boy really said that? Why don't we give him the benefit of the doubt." That's discipline, and it doesn't involve scourging or chastisement.

But every now and then, one of my children will say, "Father, will you show me that there are boundaries that shouldn't be crossed for my own safety?" And what I do on that moment is plead with them. "Please don't make me show you those boundaries. Will you please just do what I'm asking you to do? Will you just do what you know is right and good, and let's not go down this route?" Sometimes that works, and then sometimes they will go, "Um, but father, I really need to feel safe, I really need to feel valued and I need to feel loved. So will you show me that, more than your own comfort, more than your own desire, you love me enough to show me that there are certain boundaries that shouldn't be crossed?" And when your child refuses the path of peace for the path of war, you lovingly oblige them. You lovingly do it because you love them, not because you're angry, not because you had a bad week and not because you're tired.

So my fear for us is that we read texts like this as though they were suggestions and not commands from a holy, infinite, ferocious God. Yes He is a God who loves you, who is forgiving you, who is saving you and conforming you, but don't be surprised when you play with sin, invite sin into your heart, invite sin into your home and God breaks your hands. Don't be surprised when you are outed for your own good and for the glory of God.

So don't pretend that God is a Golden Retriever. He doesn't just wag His tail no matter what. He's called the Lion of Judah for a reason. Aren't you a little more cautious around a lion than you are Pookie your Golden Retriever? Even with a larger, meaner dog, you're cautious. Why? Because it will tear you to shreds. So God who is infinite, powerful and

mighty is saying, "Put this away. Stop this. It's not a suggestion." And you can't go, "I'm not going to do that, because God forgives me in Christ. So I'll do whatever I want." I don't think anyone at this church would ever say that, but that doesn't mean we don't live like that. So my fear for us is that we wouldn't take holiness serious for how serious we take grace.

Let's keep going in 1 Peter 2. So how do you put away malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander? Verse 2 is going to tell us how we do it. "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." So what can't happen right now in this talk of taking holiness serious is you can't go, "Okay, let me get to work on making sure I'm holy." Because that is exhausting. How do you put away these things? The text says it involves two things. You taste and see that the Lord is good. I'm translating that as, "You're saved." You know and love Jesus Christ. And then the next thing is to crave pure spiritual milk like a newborn infant.

I don't know if you've ever had a newborn infant in your house with you, but it's just a big nightmare. You can see, as sweet as it is, a man and woman absolutely exhausted because of the newborn infant. Why? Because they crave milk. How do they crave it? About every three hours. That's how they crave it. They need it to survive, which is why that first three or four months we war through that season getting up every couple of hours to feed the baby. And you can't reason with the baby. You can't go, "Come on, boo. Just a couple more hours." So you start making deals as a couple. "You take the 11:00 and then get some sleep. Because I'm afraid that you're going to kill me. You need to get some sleep. Let's figure out a way to make this work." You begin to make deals to survive this little window of newborn time. You're doing it just to survive, because a newborn infant is insatiable.

So if you have tasted that the Lord is good, you will crave pure spiritual milk so that you might put away malice, envy and strife, so that you might pursue holiness as serious business. How do you do it? Not by white-knuckling your behavior, but by treasuring Jesus so much that He becomes so much of your treasure that the other things lose their grip and power over your life.

So how do you treasure Jesus Christ? What is pure spiritual milk? There's one answer with two implications. God's self-disclosure of Himself is the Word. The Holy Spirit inside of us opens up the Scriptures to us that we might see God for who He is, see Christ for who He is, and that in turn allows us to treasure Him more fully and grow in confidence in Him as we apply the Word to our lives.

So there are two pieces that you know. Pure spiritual milk is a Holy Spirit ignition and understanding of the Word of God that leads to an application of the Word of God. It is not good enough to know the Bible. To know the Bible and not apply it is like someone who eats food and then vomits it before they can digest it. We know and we apply. And as we apply it, we gain confidence in what we know that begins to feed this maturation process.

So to put all my cards on the table, as a pastor probably the most frustrating thing is that people love information and hate application. When I come across people who meet me in the store or a restaurant and say, "Hey, we go to the church and just wanted to meet you. We hadn't gotten a chance to meet you," I'll almost always follow that with, "So are you connected? Are you in a home group?" The answer is often, "No, we hadn't done that yet. We just haven't been able to do that. We want to, but we just haven't been able to." "Well how long have you been going to the Village?" "Seven years." What in the world has been going on for seven years? I've had three children and moved within the last seven years. What's going on? "Well, it's this and that." And sometimes there are legitimate seasons where life is difficult and things are impossible, but most people just know they should but haven't made it a priority to.

To help you connect, we've even created things like Group Connect or the City. The City isn't magical. It's just a tool. You can connect on the City and still not know anyone, but we're trying to drive the Village Church composed of ten

thousand people on three campuses across eleven services smaller and smaller. And some of you, although you know and will have seen what the Bible commands about maturity taking place in community, will continue to find reasons not to take steps to actually get involved in a day in/day out level and will simply continue to come to hear sermons which have not begun to produce the maturity in you that you desire or that you hope for. But you're simply entertained for an hour and a half and can't wait to come back next weekend and be entertained again. That's a sad state of affairs. You rob no one but you and weaken the church while you do it. So that's a simple little place where an application of the Word leads to a confidence in the Word, leads to a treasuring of Christ in the Word that enables you to then put aside envy, slander, malice and deceit.

Let's read where he goes next. "As you come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious. . ." It's important for you to understand this just at the onset. We don't follow Jesus Christ fully, we don't give Him our complete lives because He's fashionable. He's never going to be fashionable. Following Jesus with your whole life is never going to be sexy. The whole of culture is never going to go, "Tell me more about that. I'd like to know why you're doing that." It will always appear at some level foolish. To think that you can do it in a way that makes Jesus cool is more often than not you at some level reducing the Jesus of the Bible.

Jesus doesn't need a makeover. He doesn't need new jeans or a new haircut. So people who point towards the decline of attendance in evangelical churches are actually pointing this out to go, "See? We need to change some things," instead of pointing out it was actually in the changing of things that weakened the bride to begin with. I'll contend that the reason you're seeing a lot of people fall away from church is not because Jesus needs a makeover but that He already got one and His makeover made him look a little goofy like a 60-year-old in skinny jeans.

They have reconstructed a Jesus that's more palatable, and in His coolness, He can't do what the Jesus of the Bible can. So when people are following Jesus because He's cool, because He'll do this or because He'll bring that and then He doesn't do this or bring that, then of course they're going to bail. In fact, they're going to be frustrated at Jesus for not giving them what Jesus never promised to give them. So men have rejected Jesus. Following Jesus will, in certain circles and arenas, carry with it some rejection as well.

But notice that God saw Jesus not as something to be rejected but actually as precious. He's precious. God sees differently than we do. He sees everything. We only see a spot. So in your life, sometimes you'll see something as pleasure, and God will see it as pain for you. Sometimes you will see it as difficult, and God will see as depth. We have to trust our sovereign God with our lives and with the things He introduces into our lives as shaping and molding us into what He would have us be.

Now look at verse 5. ". . . you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." You've got three pieces here. You've got a spiritual house. In Christ, we have become a spiritual house. This has nothing to do with a building. In 1 Corinthians 1:16, the apostle Paul uses the same Greek word *oikos* to talk about baptizing Stephanas' house. Now Paul didn't mean that he dragged the house off of the foundation and dunked it in the water. What did he mean? That he baptized his household, all those who were in the house. So in 1 Peter, he says that we have been made in Christ a spiritual household. He's saying that you and I, regardless of background, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of socioeconomic status, are under one roof, brothers and sisters in Christ for one another. All that we talked about in community, all that we talked about in service goes under this roof of you, I and Christ are brothers and sisters. We have the same spiritual Father, and we have the same Savior brother. We have been made one family under the roof of this spiritual house.

But the task He gives us under that roof is one of a holy priesthood. Now most people kind of know what a priest is but not completely. If you have a Catholic background, you might have some semblance of historically what a priest is. If you're a Protestant, the idea of a priest probably brings to mind some exorcism movie. So I want to try to define priest for you, and then I want us to talk about what 1 Peter means when he says we're a holy priesthood.

The best place to see a definition for what a priest is in the book of Hebrews 5. "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins." Now if you're into history, hear what I'm about to say. Every culture that we have historical data on has had priests. Regardless of location on the globe, intrinsic within man's innermost being is the understanding that he cannot freely come before a God but rather needs a mediator between himself and a God. So Hebrews 5 says that a priest is someone who stands in the gap between a man and his God, offers gifts, makes deals, barter with and makes sacrifice to the God on behalf of man.

Now that's a bit problematic for our 1 Peter definition of holy priesthood. Because the whole point of Hebrews 5 is that Jesus plays that role. So Jesus is our mediator. Jesus stands in the gap. We don't make sacrifice for our sin anymore. The sacrifice once and for all was paid for on the cross of Christ. So there is no longer a need for a mediator between us and God. That's why, in the Protestant system, there are no priests. Because we don't need the mediator. The veil has been torn. It has been opened up. All are allowed to come, not just a few.

I'm not anything different than you. I'm a sinner who is saved by grace and called unto Christ just like you. It's not that I have a role here and you have a role here. We've been called, each with different gifts, each with different talents, each with our uniqueness, to the same end. I do not have a direct line any more than you have a direct line. We both have the same direct line. He doesn't value my prayers over yours. He doesn't go, "Shut up. Chandler's talking." That's not how it works.

So in this, our mediator is Jesus Christ, who makes intercession for us, who prays for us and who claims, "I paid for their sin. They are clean. They are spotless." So when Peter calls us a holy priesthood, he can't mean that we're the mediator between God and man. Because Christ is that. So verse 2 helps some, I believe. "He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness." So how are we priests under this roof of being a spiritual household? We are priests in that we extend to the ignorant and wayward gentleness and compassion.

A person who is ignorant is simply somebody who does not know. That comes in many different flavors. There are people who are real honest and go, "Man, I just don't quite understand Jesus and His cross. I don't understand what that means. I don't understand what that has to do with me." In fact, I was there for a long time. I just had no idea what this guy dying on the cross had to do with me and my sin. I was just confused and needed someone to help me. And that's one type of ignorance. We are to deal with that type of ignorance gently and with compassion. Why? Because we were all ignorant at one time. And then there's a kind of ignorant that doesn't know it's ignorant but rather thinks it's smart. That's a more difficult kind. And yet, the command for us, in regards to being holy priests under this spiritual household, is to deal even with the arrogant ignorant gently.

And then you've got this piece of the wayward. We not only deal gently with the ignorant, but we deal gently with the wayward. Wayward would be those who maybe grew up in church, grew up liking the idea of Jesus or maybe even had surrendered their life to Christ at one time, but something happened. Maybe some pastor or preacher failed you, maybe some abuse occurred or maybe somebody said something to you that was unbelievably hurtful at the wrong time, and you said, "If this is what this is, I want nothing to do with it." And although you had sworn your allegiance to Christ, you have since moved on from that allegiance and put your allegiance in other things. You have become a torn human soul.

How do we deal with the wayward? Gently and with compassion. Why? Because it's by the grace of God alone that He has sustained us in our pursuit of Him.

Then look where Peter goes next. “. . . a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Let me read Romans 12:1-2. This will help you with those sacrifices. Because it's not bulls and goats anymore. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Our spiritual act of worship, our sacrifice is our lives. “You tell me to go, and I go. You tell me left or right, and I go left or right. I am in glad submission to Your call on my life.”

I love that we're showing the Smith video this weekend. We didn't arrange that to line up with where we were going. It's just one of those things that God does where you have this family who has everything that most of us pursue. They are a beautiful family that's in Flower Mound. Flower Mound is a pretty safe neighborhood. They're making good money, have a great house, great friends in the neighborhood and have kids who play soccer. So they have all of that, and what does God do? God, through a couple of trips and stages, says, “No, I have gifted you for bigger things, more dangerous things, things that I want to accomplish.” It has been extremely difficult. Everything from malaria multiple times to sicknesses that you can't imagine to dangers from the pressure of that culture that doesn't like the spread of the gospel. And through it all, you've got this family who says, “In a hundred years, they will have no idea that we're here. But the seed that we're sowing in the ground that brings glory to God will be here. And that's a good use of my life.” It's a spiritual act of worship.

I want to keep pointing to the fact that this keeps leading to holiness. Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, the Word of God applied. And then you'll be able to know what is good, acceptable and the Lord's will. That's when you'll be able to know.

Let's keep walking through 1 Peter 2. Verse 6, “For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe. . . .” He's just saying that Christ, the cornerstone, makes life work. So He has laid the cornerstone in such a way that, in submission to Him, life works. It lines us up with how God created things to be. It lines us up with the rhythm and flow of how He designed the universe to work.

But then he begins to get into what that means to reject that cornerstone. “. . . but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”” There was a caricature that was drawn up for those outside of Christ when I became a believer. The picture was that everyone outside of Christ had a difficult marriage, they were stubborn and greedy, they weren't good to their children and they were probably on drugs. There was this caricature of them. I believe you can want to have nothing to do with Jesus Christ and be generous. I think you can want to have nothing to do with Jesus Christ and have a good marriage. I think you can want to have nothing to do with Jesus Christ and be good parents. I could go on and on.

But I believe with everything in me that, outside of Jesus Christ, you will never know the fullness of any of those things. So could you have good in those areas? Absolutely. Will you have what they were designed to be and what they were designed to bring? Absolutely not.

Can you have good sex and not be a believer in Christ? Yes. But the Bible lays out God going, “This is how it should work.” So in the confines of marriage, when you get to sex, you get this Hebrew word *dowd* or a mingling of souls. So

can you have sex and not be a believer in Christ? Can you have the mingling of souls in the sexual acts outside of Jesus Christ? No. It's a physical, maybe emotional act, but it doesn't become a good spiritual act, an act of worship outside of Jesus Christ.

Can you have a good romantic marriage outside of Jesus Christ? Absolutely. Will you know the freedom and confidence that come in knowing that you're safe and secure in love for one another, not out of emotions, but out of a steadfast love for Jesus Christ that fuels and sustains even in the darkest of moments? No, you won't know that. You can't.

Can you raise good citizens of the United States of America and not be a Christian? Absolutely. You can put your kids in Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, you can teach them to be good citizens, you can teach them to be moral and upright, you can keep them away from those bad kids who smoke the pot and you can do all of that, and they can go to college, they can meet somebody, fall in love, become an engineer, get married, have babies and do all of that outside of Jesus Christ. But the Bible is clear that the reason you were given children is not because you're awesome but rather because God is entrusting to you souls to impart the wisdom and glory of God to. So raising good citizens who aren't aware of how spectacular Christ is is to have failed in your responsibilities as a parent.

I need to clarify two things here. First, if your kids are believers in Christ, quit patting yourself on the back. You didn't save your kids. At best, you put kindling around them that the Holy Spirit ignited. Second, if your kids aren't believers in Christ, you did the best you could with where you were, and they have made the decision before the Lord not to follow Him. So quit blaming yourself and quit walking in a pride that would say that you own salvation. There are no perfect parents, none of us. The best we can do with where we are is be obedient to how we understand the Lord, gather around our children kindling and beg the Holy Spirit to ignite it.

““The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”” So since God is the Creator of all things, God has some commands about everything. So God has not opinions but commands about everything. Let's pick one like sexuality. Now that's a stumbling block to some, and that's an offense to some. God has commands around marriage and divorce, and that is a stumbling block to some and an offense to some. For people who have rejected Jesus, Jesus is offensive and those who love Jesus are offensive, even if you're walking gently.

Now look at the next line. “They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” This is taking us back to that spiritual household idea. Do you see that everything that would divide us into people groups just got broken down? You are a chosen race. So now the barrier of race does not exist under the roof of the spiritual household of God. The priesthood finds their provision in the household of God. All of a sudden the socioeconomic barrier begins to be dismantled. We are a people of His possession. I could dwell on that one all day long.

I delight that my kids are my kids. Even in their quirks, even when they somewhat embarrass me, I've learned, “This is pretty funny. This is pretty quirky. That's an odd little thing there.” My oldest is a bit of an entrepreneur. She's always starting little businesses. She's eight-years-old. She has a little dog walking business. She makes duct tape wallets that she gives kids at school. She's just an entrepreneur. I think it's cute. I think it's quirky. She's trying to get incorporated right now. She's just an interesting little girl. My son is ridiculously sweet and a bit of a poet. My youngest is like the Kraken. She just destroys everything. In all of that, I get really excited that these are mine, that these are Chandler babies. They're mine. . .and Lauren's, but they're ours! In this season, they belong to us.

Now we know ultimately they belong to the Lord, but feel the weight of that. God in the heavens, for all your rebellion, for all your wickedness, for all your lack of pursuit of holiness, is saying, "You're My possession. You're Mine." He delights in, He boasts in and He's glad for you in Christ. How spectacular is that?

And then look how he ends it, because I think this is so huge. "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." It's imperative for you to understand what he said at the beginning of that closing. We are sojourners and exiles. Here's what that means, and here's how you say no to the passions of the flesh. This isn't it. Right now, this moment, this 30, 40, 60, 80 years you're going to get is not it. If you view this as it, if you view this as the pinnacle, if this is all you're going to get, if this is all you've got, then you will give in to the passions of the flesh, because you will believe the lie that this life is long and eternity is short instead of understanding that this life is short and eternity is long.

It's an understanding that we are exiles and sojourners, that we are aliens and strangers that we can begin to live openly and not seek ultimately comfort, money or power as our aims. And I don't believe money is a bad thing. I don't think power is a bad thing. I don't think those things are wicked or intrinsically evil. But I think they have a way of removing God from His throne and replacing God on His throne as what we are really after.

Some of you haven't made moves in obedience because comfort is your God. Some of you only follow God inasmuch as you believe inasmuch as you believe He can grant you comfort. You don't see eternally; you see in the temporary. And if you're only looking in the temporary, you'll find nothing but reasons to indulge the passions of your flesh. But if you're looking to eternity, then you'll pay any price in obedience.

It's why Paul says that the current sufferings he was enduring, which go beyond the suffering of anyone I've met in my life, is not worthy to be compared to the future glory. Do you see where his eyes are? His eyes aren't, "It would be easy to bail. Let's just go back to Tarsus. I'm a brilliant guy. I could teach in university. I could be powerful with the Pharisees." No. He's going, "Eternity is long. Life is short. I'm sowing in that." If we could get that, it would be so much easier to put the flesh to death by craving pure spiritual milk, living for eternity, being transformed by the beauty of Christ in our lives.

So let me close by addressing three people. Number one, maybe you're in here today and we need to go back to the beginning of the sermon. Maybe you have not taken holiness seriously. Maybe that's in the life of your mind, maybe that's with sex or maybe that's with money, but you have not taken God's call to holiness seriously. I want to plead with you, as someone who cares for you, to repent before God, to seek help and community to walk through the lusts of your hearts into holiness before God breaks your hands, before God breaks your legs, before He bloodies your nose. Because He does scourge all those He loves.

Maybe that's not you. Maybe you're ignorant. So as clearly as I can articulate this to you, you are a sinner. "Well I don't believe in sin." Okay, you are a liar (you have lied). You are a thief (you have stolen). "Well I was 10-years-old." Well you were you when you were 10. You have pursued other gods. "I haven't pursued any other gods." You love things more than you love God, therefore that thing, whatever is uppermost in your affection, is the god that you serve. You have been disobedient to your parents. You have envied. Do you see what I'm doing here? I'm just walking through the Ten Commandments, and you fail.

You have sinned against a holy God, but God being rich in mercy has made a way for you in Christ to be not only forgiven completely but also set free from the bondage to sin and set free to pursue holiness that isn't driven by your will but rather driven by delight in Him. So Jesus Christ lives a perfect life, fulfills the law, dies death, absorbs the wrath of God

towards you, that if you put your hope and trust in His sacrifice and His perfect life, if you would cry out to Him for mercy, mercy is granted. So know in full what you just knew in part. The reason we love Jesus is because Jesus saves us. How? He gives us His righteousness. He takes from us the wrath due our sin. Which sins? All our sins, past, present and future, have been taken care of once and for all by the High Priest Jesus. Humble yourself before Him. Ask for mercy. He saves. That's what He does.

Third, maybe you're a brother or sister and you're just wayward. Let me appeal to you. I don't want to make light of what happened to you in your past that you use to justify your rebellion against God. I do want to push you in one area. Do you know what got lost in all of that, "They're hypocrites. . .they hurt people. . .they're in it for money or power"? Your shortcomings, your hypocrisy, your power play and your love for this world. So if you would bear the same judgment on your own heart that you judged on the church, you will find yourself just as lacking if not more.

And then as a pastor, let me just say this for what happened in the past if it was around the church and was sinful. I'm sorry. There are imperfect, broken men and women (I am one of them) leading the bride of Christ. Part of that is the glory of God that He would use idiots like us. We make mistakes, and we say the wrong thing at the wrong time. As much as we study, as much as we pray, we still make mistakes. There are wolves out there. There are those who are in pulpits who are about money, about power and about taking advantage of, as the Bible tells us, from weak-willed women to ignorant men. So if this is a legitimate wound, I'm sorry.

Here's the good news of the gospel. Jesus will, by His cross, forgive them like He has you or He will rightfully and justly judge them. So take the anger out of your heart. Vengeance is the Lord's. If you've pledged allegiance to Christ and you've pledged allegiance to the world, you'll be miserable in both places. Come home. Don't you know Luke 15? Don't you know the story of the prodigal? The father runs, throws the robe over his son, puts the ring on his finger and celebrates that the wayward son came home. Quit running. Don't let your life blow up to the point where there is serious collateral damage around your surrender to the Lord. Come home.

Let's pray. "Holy Spirit, I pray that You would press on areas that need to be pressed on. For some of us, it's a lack of seriousness around holiness, around purity, around unity. We have declawed and defanged the Lion of Judah. Forgive us. We have made light of the cross. Forgive us. May we take seriously Your call to holiness. I want to pray for the ignorant, that You might open up hearts unto salvation. I want to pray for the wayward, that You would woo them home today. We need Your help in all these things. Sermons and songs won't do it, but Your Spirit can draw. So where we need to talk to someone, I pray that we would have the courage to make moves towards obedience. It's for your beautiful name I pray. Amen."