

Good evening, 7:15. You guys look good. You look especially good. I just love this service. I'll just leave it at that. I love this service. Hey, let's go to Hebrew 1, and we'll start in verse 1, the passage we read. While you're turning there... This week, on Madison Avenue in New York City, which is the marketing and advertising hub of the United States and probably the globe, you're going to have some really high-level conversations from some serious players, some late nights, some stressful, possibly tense conversations, because in six months, they will have 30 seconds of our time, and they have to get it right.

I'm talking of course of the Super Bowl. Roughly six months from now, they're going to have 30 seconds of our time to convince us like they did last year that God made a farmer through Paul Harvey, and so we should buy Dodge trucks, or like they did 10 years ago, that talking frogs makes drinking beer cool, so we should drink Budweiser. They're kind of plotting these stories right now. They have 30 seconds of our time six months from now to say something very clear that gets our attention.

The sum of all of their storyboarding and all of their subplotting and all of their wordsmithing, all the backstory that goes into these 30 seconds in January will be gauged by this one question. Did you get the message, and will you respond favorably? They really want to get your attention. I think there is something similar going on here in Hebrews as we look at chapter 1. Let's read the first two verses.

I think this is kind of the motif of these verses, if you will. "**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.**" What this is saying is that for a long time and in a bunch of ways, God has been talking about something.

Adam Griffin did a great job last week of showing us that through all the stories and subplots of the Old Testament, that one thing, the clearest, the most direct, the most focused thing God has ever said to us to get our attention is Jesus. That's what he has told us. Let's just end the service. Let's go to Hopdoddy. That's how you end a sermon, right? You get to Jesus. "Amen. See y'all." Awesome. Right?

That's the most focused, clear thing God could tell us is Jesus, look directly into the eyes of his Son, through whom the world was made, and for whom everything is a gift. This is Jesus. I love the way this letter starts, even though it's interesting and intrigues me. It's always important when you read the Bible to understand the context in which the letter was written. For us, we know this letter was written to Jewish

Christians in Rome. We don't know the author. It's the only book of the New Testament that we don't know the author, but we know the author of Hebrews knew the people he was writing to because he said he longed to see them.

In college, I went to Rome. I went to Rome in the summer of 2004. I was there for five days by myself. Before I met up with the group, I had some really bad experience with goat cheese, so I got kind of skittish of food in Italy, which in hindsight was really dumb that I didn't eat food there. I went to this staple which was McDonald's and a lot of gelato. That was dumb for several reasons, but at least my body knew what it was.

I went there, stayed in a hostel where the bathroom, which was a little closet that also doubled as the shower. There was no way to take a shower without your foot touching the toilet. I'm not lying. That was my time in Rome. I remember standing between the Coliseum and the Forum, standing there and learning about the Great Fire of 64. This isn't 1964; this is AD 64, where there was a huge fire that spread all throughout Rome.

Nero, who was the emperor, who was just a lunatic, was blamed by the Roman citizens for the fire, and so he, being quick on his feet, responded and said, "I didn't start it. The Christians started this fire." The result of this blame...Tacitus the historian tells us that large crowds gathered and Christians were convicted. These are our brothers and sisters. They were put in animal skins. They were killed by dogs, and some of them were crucified.

I quote Tacitus when he says they were set on fire to serve to light the city by nightfall. These are the very people... This is happening. This is real time as this letter is being written to this church in Rome. This is what they're experiencing. It's not just a little suffering but full-fledged persecution. They knew who Jesus was. I'm certain of that. They knew Jesus was crucified. They knew following him entailed suffering. They knew he had promised eternal life. They knew he had turned the world upside down in his resurrection.

They knew these things. In their minds, they knew this. There are just some things you know, like LBJ/I-635. It's always going to be chaos. We know that. You know this. I know this. We know that there is a really good chance right now that they're moving the exit somewhere else, and on your way tomorrow, you're going to miss the exit like I have. We know there is probably a good chance that once they finish LBJ into this double-decking, glorious thing that God is probably going to call most of us away from Dallas. That's what I think too.

We know LBJ is going to be chaotic. We know Mexican food is better in Texas. We know that. I have a very dear friend in my life from South Georgia. I went to see him last week, and he came to Dallas for the last

three years. He just moved back, but he came to Dallas for seminary. I'm not going to tell you his name. Jordan Crews. Jordan would go to these great Tex-Mex restaurants we have, and he would be like, "You know, yeah. It's pretty good, but what y'all really need is that white cheese dip. Y'all don't have that white cheese dip."

I'm like, "Dude, what in the world is white cheese dip? Are you talking about that stuff you buy in a can at Kroger?" He's like, "No. You know, y'all's cheese is yellow. You need that white cheese dip." I'm like, "Bro, we call it *queso* for a reason." For three years, he kept telling me, "Yeah, y'all's food is good, but you need to come to Georgia to have real Mexican food." I'm just going, "Dude, Georgia borders the Atlantic. We border Mexico. We win. We call it *queso* because that's what it's called. *Queso*. We win."

There are just some things you know. LBJ is going to be crazy. Mexican food is better in Texas. And these people, these Christians in this church knew Jesus had promised them eternal life, that following him was costly, but they were still struggling. They were running to all sorts of stuff in the midst of their struggle. The author writes them a letter. The best way for us to understand this letter is in a sermon form. He writes them a sermon.

Like a good friend, he acknowledges their pain. He reminds them of their reward, and then he really presses into areas where he sees they're running. He asks them this question, in essence. This is the question he's asking the church. He says, "Why are you running when you've already been rescued?" This letter has a lot to say to them, and I believe it has a lot to say to us too, because just like them, we know the promises of God, but we also forget them often.

What were they running to? I think they were running to four different kinds of things. They were running to religion. They were running inward, that is to say more into themselves and away from the community. They were running to the world and to worldly pleasure, and then they were running to strange teachings. Those are kind of the four broad categories of what they were running to that the author speaks to.

They're running to religion, which Martin Luther said is the default mode of the heart. He's right. These Christians, especially with their historical understanding of their relationship with God, are going to struggle with religion more and more and more. What's interesting is that when you look at the book of Hebrews, you can almost put it over the Old Testament book of Leviticus, and it's like this clear transparency that goes over it, because Leviticus is really all about the rules we follow, the laws that honor God, the kind of ceremonies and celebrations we need to have.

They thought that because they weren't doing these things, that might explain the kind of punishment that's being brought onto them. They're asking questions like, "Is my hardship a result of me not obeying

God?" You see, religion says I'm accepted on the basis of my obedience. Because I'm not being obedient, God probably has a problem with me. They're saying, "What am I doing wrong? How do I get back on his good side? How do I make it where he's not mad at me anymore?" These are the questions and some of the things they're running back to. They're running back to religious impulses.

Then they're running inward. They're running away from the community, and they're running into really themselves. They're stiff-arming their brother and sisters. Maybe they're running to their imagination. Maybe fantasy. Maybe they're just pretending that the world out there is not as bad as it actually is. While that might temporarily numb the pain, all of us know that doesn't fix anything. The pretend doesn't do much except give you a little bit more time not to think about something.

The author writes to them in the tenth chapter, "Don't neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some." He's saying, "You guys are turned inward. You've isolated." What we know and what I know as a pastor and as I read the Scripture is that isolation, being by yourself, is often the very place for the Enemy to attack and destroy. He isolates and he attacks. He isolates and he attacks, and he's going, "The Enemy is at work in your body, and you need to recognize that."

They're also running thirdly to worldly pleasure. They're going, "Man, let's just turn to our troubles and face this thing. Following Jesus is too hard. It's going to get you killed." For them it actually meant it could very well get them killed. They author says, "You're neglecting your salvation. You're hardening your hearts. You're forgetting the very fact that you've been rescued." He writes in the third chapter, "You have an evil, unbelieving heart that's leading you to fall away. You need to press back into maturity very quickly."

Lastly, just because church folk like us come in all kinds, they're running to...hear this...this really broad bucket, diverse and strange teachings. That's really a wide open category. One of the things they were running to was they were worshipping their guardian angel. I mean, they were just kind of thinking of things and worshipping it. The author is going, "Hey, man, I think you're kind of making things up, and you don't need to do that. You need to run back to the community."

These are the four kinds of escape we see in this church in Rome. I love the tone of the book of Hebrews. I love the tone because the author is calling out these Christians like a good friend. He's encouraging them, and then he's exhorting them. I have a very dear friend in my life, Brandon Barker, who is a pastor here at The Village, and he's about to leave in a few months to go plant a church in Chicago. In this way, Brandon has probably been my truest friend in that Brandon has several times told me things about myself and about my life that I didn't want to hear.

Half the time, I wanted to sock him in the face when he did. You know that. Don't act like you don't have that kind of friend, that anointed prophet who can tell you things you're like, "Oh, that stings." Brandon is that guy, but on the flipside of that, Brandon has been a choice, choice friend to affirm me in areas where it was hard for me to hear. He put things into my life. He told me true things about me that were hard for me to hear. If you have a friend like that (just as an aside), treasure that person.

What that person is doing is he or she is modeling the character of God. That's what he's doing. He's telling you very affirming, true things about yourself and also telling you difficult truths you need to hear and you need to respond to. This is kind of the tone of the letter of Hebrews. The author is saying, "It's not easy. I'm not going to presume it's easy, but why are you running when you've been rescued?" It might be helpful for us to see what happens when we keep running.

I couldn't think of anybody better to study here than Jacob. Let's go to Genesis 28 and study old Jacob. While you're turning there, I just want you to know there is this idea that anybody who made it in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is some kind of character whose life is worthy for you to aspire. Jacob kind of cuts that out by its legs, because it's not true. A lot of times, God takes somebody, and he uses most of the weaknesses and most of the foolishness in their life to give us a picture of how he redeems people who have been running for a long time.

That's true of Jacob's life. His name means deceiver. In essence, he's the Forrest Gump of the Old Testament. He's just always running. He runs always and everywhere. He's worried about what people think about him. He's scared of his hairy, bulky, big brother. He has girl problems. He has family drama. He's jealous. He's a runner. In Genesis 28 (I'll set the table), he has some family drama, but he leaves with his dad's blessing. He has this dream where God really shows up. He's by himself.

God says what he told his dad and his grandpa. "I'm going to bless you, and I'm going to bless your kids. I'm not going to leave you until I do what I promised I'm going to do." He wakes up the next morning, and he goes, "That was really cool." Here's what he says. We have it recorded in the Bible in Genesis 28:20. He says, "**Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God."**"

If you hear what he's saying, he's going, "If God will let me do what I want, if he'll give me everything I want, then I'll take him." He's very flippant about it, very nonchalant about the Lord showing up in front of his eyes. What he's saying in essence is, "If God will ride side-saddle, if he'll piggy back onto my plans, yeah, I'll call him Lord. I'll call him Lord. He can bless me, but it will still be on my terms." The problem

with that is that when you're God (which nobody in this room is), you are able... Part of the benefit of being God is that you can ask anything you want. He can ask anything he wants of any one of us.

He can ask us to do anything in the world, because he's God. Jacob doesn't realize this yet, so he's still running. You see, Jacob grew up hearing about the God of his dad and the God of his grandpa and about these stories of that God showing up, but this God is not yet Jacob's Lord. You see, faith can be cultural. It can be political. It can be psychological, and it can still not be personal.

We have a lot of cultural faith in the South, in Texas. "It's the good Lord. I just trust the good Lord." In essence, if you said, "I'm not saying the good Lord isn't the good Lord, but sometimes the good Lord is not the good Lord, if that makes sense." Faith can just be cultural where you believe there is a God up in the heavens, and you call him the good Lord, but it's not personal.

It can be political. There are a number of people who think that because they are a Republican that they're on the side of morals. Because they're on the side of morals, they're on the side of God. That's really weird, but some people believe that. Faith can also be psychological, which means you can take more of a Christian worldview into your problem solving. That doesn't mean it's personal.

For it to get personal, God has to get personal. For him to get personal, he is going to cut. He is going to look you square in the eyes. He is going to say, "I'm God. I'm the perfect one. I know anything and I know everything about you. I know what will bring you hope, and I know what will bring you healing. I know these things about you." He has to look you in the eyes and meet with you face to face.

Jacob doesn't see this yet. We kind of fast forward four chapters. I'll just kind of fly over these and give you a summation here. There is some more in-law drama. There is some more tricky family situation. There are some girl issues, some wives issues. Then there is some in-law drama. Then he leaves, and he's headed back to his hometown, but he's still running.

Then we get to Genesis 32. When we pick up here, we see that he's more and more fearful of Esau his brother. To a degree, he should be fearful of Esau, because he took the most significant thing you could take from the firstborn son, his birthright and his blessing. He thinks his brother is going to kill him. His brother is always on his mind. He's anxious, and he's unraveling. You see, everything he's doing is to make his brother like him.

This is what we call the fear of man. The fear of man. Something I think many of us if not all of us in this room grapple with is when we want people to like us. We want certain people, especially those people

whose opinions of us really matter for our lives and our wellbeing, we want that person to like us. He's just spending all of his time thinking about his brother.

The problem with the fear of man is that when you want somebody to like you so much, you become terrified when they don't, almost paralyzed when they don't sometimes, if you don't feel like you're walking in the good graces of another person. This is what he's dealing with. He starts to give his brother sheep, and that's like the most significant, profound thing you could give somebody in that culture. That's like throwing cash at them. "Here are my sheep. Just take it. Just please don't be mad at me." We start to see Jacob break down.

I was in Georgia last week, and my mom called me and said, "Hey, your air conditioner is broken in your house. What do you want to do?" I said, "Take our life savings and fix it." Seriously. I'm kind of cheap, but I'm going, "I don't want to come back to a house that's really hot. I really don't. It's Sunday. Pay the emergency. Whatever. Get them out there. Please just get it fixed."

The Lord was good. It wasn't nearly as expensive as I thought it was going to be, but I know, because I've sat in the house, I think you guys have too. I know what it's like to sit in Dallas or in Texas in July and August in a house that doesn't have air conditioning. I think the best way I can say it is that it drains the life out of your soul. That's the only way. Everything you do, everything you're experiencing, you can't neglect the fact that it's hot and that you're sweating. It's just affecting everything. It's seeping into everything.

This is what happens when you fear people. It drains your soul. It sucks the life out of you. You're constantly aware of it. This is what's happening to Jacob, and he says, "I don't know who I am." He's unraveling. He's like, "I don't know who I am, and I need something else." What he thinks is the end of his road is just the Lord melting ice around his heart. We read his prayer in chapter 32, verses 9-12. Let's read that prayer. Listen to this. Listen to his heart.

"And Jacob said, 'O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

What we see here (it's hard to miss) is that Jacob does this really profound thing. He invokes God's personal name. He says Yahweh Elohim. You see, any prayer is a dependent pray. Any prayer of meaning is

a dependent prayer where your posture is bowing (if not your knees then your heart) to the Lord, and you're invoking this name of reverence. That's what he does. He calls God by his personal name.

This is the Lord humbling him and exposing his fears. He's finally saying, "I'm vulnerable. My life can't be in these possessions or in these girls or in what my brother thinks about me or even my separation from all of this family drama. I can't run. It's sucking the life out of my soul. I wasn't made for this." He calls on the Lord. What does the Lord do? The Lord answers him. The Lord gets him alone. Verse 22. God gets him by himself, and he says:

"The same night he [Jacob] arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day."

He's overshadowed his entire life by a faith that had not yet penetrated his heart, and the Lord said, "Jacob, it's time for you and I to do business." He gets him alone. Let's keep reading. Verse 25.

"When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day has broken.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.'"

It says a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. Wrestling. I know a lot of people say your best cardio is swimming or running or triathlons, and I'll give you all of that. For me, the best cardio in the entire world is wrestling. It's the best cardio because two minutes into a good wrestling match, you're exhausted. Nobody on staff will wrestle me. I'm kind of bitter about it. Except Isaac, but he can whip me. I love to wrestle. I just love it.

He's exhausted, and we find out this man who is wrestling with him is God, and he's intruding upon him, and he's cutting. What is he doing? He's running him down. He's like, "I'm not going to let you run anymore. I'm here. I love you too much." God meets Jacob exactly where he is, but he meets him on his terms. This time, Jacob hangs on. This time he hangs on. He wrestles back because he sees the face of the one who is cutting him.

Why does he hang on? Because he knows the Lord loves him, and he's learning to trust the Lord that he knows best. Remember his prayer? Remember what he said in the midst of his running away? Through all

of those years, he recognizes that the Lord still loves him, and he says, "I'm not worthy of the least of all your deeds and steadfast love and all the faith you've shown me."

You see, when we wrestle with God, when we get face to face before the Lord, he's going to win. He's going to win. He's going to win. He's going to overpower us. He's God. What he says as he reveals the things we are running to is going to hurt. Where we have tried to find joy apart from him, and especially when we try to bring our justifications for why we've been living a certain way, he's going to push back on those justifications, and it's going to hurt.

It might hurt so much to the point that you walk away with a little bit of a limp because you're humbled by what he has to say. How great is it, how wonderful is it, that we have a God who will meet us wherever we are and join us in this wrestling, this hard, exhilarating, difficult wrestling match of a conversation called prayer? How wonderful is it that we have a God who will meet us there and look us in our eyes and tell us, "You have to stop doing this"?

When he says that, it's going to hurt. You're going to walk away with a limp, but he doesn't want us to stay on our limp, because he wants to tell us that with that limp is coming a blessing, and that blessing is, "I will never let you go. I'm hanging onto you always, only into eternity." We walk, but we walk with the blessing. Jacob realizes this.

We all have our Jacob stories. We're all like the Hebrews in some way. In various forms and degrees, we're rescued people who still run. What changed Jacob is when he got face to face. He saw something. Something changed him. What changed him? Let's keep reading Hebrews. Let's go back to chapter 1. Concerning Jesus.

"He 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'?"

I told you guys I thought this was a curious way to start the letter. Where is the, "Hey guys. I know it's hard. I hope you're doing well." It's a sermon. It just starts, and it starts really dense. It starts really thick. It's high theology, even at the beginning. This is how the letter starts. As I was asking myself this question, it reminded me of the great American classic, *The Karate Kid*. In *The Karate Kid*, you have Daniel. Daniel wants to learn karate. He's kind of a troubled kid.

He meets Mr. Miyagi. He wants to learn karate. Mr. Miyagi over time says, "Yeah, I'll teach you karate." Daniel goes over to Mr. Miyagi's house, and Daniel thinks it's going to be hand-to-hand combat day one, but Mr. Miyagi goes famously, "Okay, you're going to spend a lot of time the first few days washing my car. Ready? Wax on, wax off. Wax on, wax off." After he's done, he goes, "You're going to paint my fence. You're not going to paint the fence like that. You're going to use the wrist like that, and you're going to paint the fence. Use both hands."

After that was done, he goes, "It's time to sand the floors." So he does these big sweeping things. Finally Daniel is frustrated. He comes to him and says, "Hey, you're using me. You're basically treating me like your lackey." Mr. Miyagi, like a great sensei, looks at him, and he starts throwing punches and throwing kicks. (Man, I want to do that right now.) He goes, "Do wax on. Do wax off. Do painting." Daniel realizes that these forms he had been doing for a ton of hours now were actually teaching him karate, and he's learning how to block.

It's really cool, because Mr. Miyagi knew what he was doing, and Daniel had to trust him. Daniel throws a little fit. Mr. Miyagi shows him, "This is what you needed." This is what the church in Rome needed. This is what we need if you're suffering. If you are enduring affliction, there is nothing better for you than to drill deeply into the resume of your Redeemer. The author of Hebrews drives into the character of God, and he says on Jesus that he is the radiance of the glory of God.

In 2001, I was a freshman at A&M. That was the year really of the steroid and baseball. We were looking at all these guys hit home runs, and my friends and I went down to Houston to watch Barry Bonds who was with the Giants play the Astros. He didn't hit a home run, and we were coming back up Highway 45. We took a weird way back to College Station. If you've ever seen Highway 45, it's that barren, desolate stretch of land between Dallas and Houston that I promise you Pat Green or Zac Brown will never write an endearing song about.

You'll never hear a song about that Highway 45 ride, because it's just ugly. It's flat. You get to Centerville which is halfway between Dallas and Houston, and you're like, "I seriously have this much longer to go." We weren't familiar with the road. About nearing Huntsville on the corner of the right side of the road, we see this glowing, glorious thing. All of us go, "What in the world is that?" I was reading a lot of *Left Behind* back then. I'm seriously like, "Here it is in Huntsville, Texas. "*"These are the days of Elijah..."* 'Here it is. The Lord has descended.'

For two minutes, we were just like, "What is that?" Nobody knew. Then we pull up close enough, and it is a beautiful, immaculate, granite statue of Sam Houston all lit up at night. It was Sam Houston. Behold the glory of Sam Houston. During those two minutes when we did not know, I promise you something about

radiant glory. It stops you in your tracks. It really does. That word *radiance*, one commentator tells us this word is the radiance shining forth from the source of light. This is the visible expression of God's presence.

When we talk about *glory*, which in this passage means light, it's something that makes clear what something is. Israel loved their glory stories. In fact, Jesus accumulated thousands and thousands and thousands of followers on the basis of the miracles he performed. They loved the miracles. Even if you go back to the history of Israel, they love telling the stories about when Moses did this and the Red Sea parted or when he came out from meeting with God, and his face was shining with *shekinah* glory. They love those stories.

As wonderful as those stories are, they are all manifestations of his power, but Jesus is a manifestation of his presence, and that makes him altogether different. That's why Colossians can say that all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him. He's brilliant. He's absolutely brilliant, and whether you recognize this now, one day you will. One day you will look at Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and he will stop you in your tracks. He's that gloriously good and brilliant.

He's the radiance of the glory of God, and he's the exact imprint of his nature. These are two huge words, *imprint* and *nature*, two really, really big words. *Imprint* means character. It's the Greek word *charakter*. The idea here is that if you took a coin and you take a superscription of the coin... If we wanted to make a quarter, you take this metal, this alloy, and you take this superscription of George Washington's mug, and you put them together, and they're identical when they come together.

That's what he's saying. Jesus is the very imprint of the nature of God. This is a very significant word, *hypostasis*. That word means the very essence and actual being of God, that Jesus is identical in substance to God. There are things you have to get right. We call this orthodoxy. There are things you have to get right.

If my wife and I go to a place that has sandwiches, which is a lot of restaurants, this is what I know. Five years into marriage, I don't know a whole lot, but this is what I know. You don't put mayonnaise on her sandwich. You do not put mayonnaise. If she were here and I said mayonnaise, it would gross her out. She doesn't like mayonnaise. I love mayonnaise. You can put mayonnaise on anything for me. I'm okay with that, but if you put mayonnaise on her sandwich (even though ironically she likes chicken salad, and that's a whole 'nother conversation), she's five-foot-nothing, and you will incur the wrath of my sweet wife.

There are some things you have to get right. This is one of them. We're talking of hundreds of years of high-level conversations, a bunch of councils for us to say that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was fully man and fully God in his character and his nature, both 100 percent man, 100 percent God, two natures in one man,

because salvation is not possible if as a man he doesn't represent us to God, and as God he doesn't represent God to us. We had one chance at redemption, one mediator, and that was Jesus being fully man and fully God. We call that orthodoxy, and there are just some things you have to get right, and this is one of them.

Our salvation is not possible unless these two things are true. A perfect man reconciling us with God who is God. He calls him the imprint and the nature, the very nature of God. He says he upholds the universe by the word of his power. What that means is that in biblical times, when Jesus was walking around, he looked at storms probably 10 times nastier than this one we hope is going to come into Dallas this week.

He looked at those storms, and he was taking a nap on a boat, and he stood up, and he said something quite pejorative to that storm and told it to go away, and the storm had to go away. It had no other choice. It was listening to its Creator. He upholds the world, upholds the universe by the word of his power. He holds all things together, as Colossians says, so there is zero chance that something is going on right now that Jesus doesn't have control of.

In your life, there is no looming decision, there is nothing he doesn't know. The suffering church in Rome needed to hear this, and so do you. He's infinitely more steps ahead of you than you. He's aware of everything. He speaks, and there are no debates. So many of us in this room know that, but even though we know that, we still run. I think we still run. I know we still run to the things the church in Rome was running to. I think we run to religion.

I grew up in a church with wonderful, wonderful people surrounding me, wonderful family. I grew up in a church where the central icon of that church was Jesus hanging on the cross. I remember seeing that for years and years and years, and I would look at him. His body would be battered. There would be really detailed lines in his face with the blood coming out and the crown of thorns on his head and the hole in his side. That is a wonderfully good impression for you to have and for me to have, that Jesus Christ was slaughtered on the cross.

When that was the central icon that was held up for me as a kid at this church, I looked at Jesus on the cross, I looked at him bloody, and I didn't question that he was God. I didn't question that he loved me, but I always thought he was just a little bit mad at me. I always did. What was conveyed to me (this is my story) is, "Look how much God did for you. Why can't you just do a little bit for him?"

I knew he loved me. I knew he did, but I thought surely he like me a little better when I was acting right and he tolerated me a little bit less when I was acting a fool, because I thought I stood under the perpetual gaze of his frustration. I know that's true for some of you guys as well. You know the Lord loves you, but

you think he's just always a little bit mad at you. He's always just a little bit perturbed and annoyed by you that you're not totally clean and you have some growth or some growing up to do.

Once you do that, then he'll really accept you. Maybe you've done things nobody knows about, so you think you're just ostracized out of the camp, and it's not possible for you to be redeemed. Maybe you've come to look at those things you've done and say, "I am going to, by my good deeds, erase this scarlet letter. I'm going to erase it. I'm going to move forward."

I know some of us, beyond turning to religion, are turning inward, are turning away from the community and more into ourselves. We're turning away from the people of God and more to ourselves. Let me say this as an aside. If you grew up in a church that preached hate, if you grew up in a pulpit that was supposed to preach grace but preached hate, I'm sorry. Seriously. I'm sorry on behalf of the church. I'm sorry, because that's not the gospel.

The men who handled that word didn't handle it well. If that's what you grew up hearing, I'm sorry you feel condemned, but you and I both know (and you know it better than I) that you're not going anywhere sitting and loathing in your frustration. It's not getting you anywhere. You know that. Beyond that, some of you have jumped from church to church or friend to friend or people to people or group to group or maybe even city to city. You have all of these frustrations everywhere you have gone, this long line of frustrations.

Maybe you're missing that the common denominator in all of those situations is *you*. Maybe kind of like a Taylor Swift song. Seriously. She's a gifted musician, but doesn't it always seem like it's everybody else's fault? I just go, "Man, is that...?" In running away, in running from people, in running, you've dug in your heels and you've made up your mind that you and Jesus of Nazareth are really cool. You have this pact into eternity.

The difficulty with that, the problem with that is you are missing his word to you. That word is that he who wants to find his life will lose it in the service of others, specifically this blood-bought people he calls his bride. Isolation is unbelievably dangerous. In fact, there is no category really for it in the New Testament apart from somebody who has been removed from the body for them to recognize how much they need the body.

It's just scary that they were running to isolation, and so were we, running away from the people to God and then running to worldly pleasure. They were doing that too. They're saying following Jesus is too hard. Cultural Christianity is easy. It's easy in Dallas. There is not a lot of credibility lost when I tell people I'm a pastor. In some circles it's awkward, but for most it's not.

Biblical Christianity, something altogether different, is difficult. It's difficult in Dallas, and as much as y'all continue to hear about the world and all her snares and about the dangers of running away from Jesus to one night stands, to people, power, to possessions, to what people think about you. You hear it all the time. You still haven't figured out how hollow chasing that Dallas dream is. You still haven't figured it out.

When I think about this campus specifically, I think about the temptations you guys face at this campus, that the last two covenant membership classes we had, the median age was 22 and 23. We are a ridiculously young church, and I love it. It's full of college students. It's full of young professionals. We're really young. When I think about the temptations you guys have, I grieve with you, and I pray for you, because it is an epidemic here for us to be consumed with what people think about us in order to get something from them we want.

Ladies, I think about you. I think about the way Dallas teaches you to dress and the way it upholds keeping with the culture and feeling attractive in that way of dress. You are so given to doing that, because you think if you don't dress a certain way, you're going to miss some guy's attention. Guys, we buy into this. We perpetuate this, because you have godly women here who you are walking by who would love you and would be a wonderful wife and would bear beautiful children, but you're missing them, because your minds have been reengineered to think you need beauty like Dallas describes it. It's just this cycle.

Ladies, you have guys who love and fear the Lord asking you out on dates, and they don't look like Prince Charming, so you're giving them a stiff-arm. I'm going, "Come on, now." That's Dallas. That's Dallas influencing us. I know it's hard. I know we are uber tempted here, especially you guys. I'm coming alongside you as your pastor recognizing the temptation, wanting to pray with you, and telling you to be really careful out there, because even though we're not persecuted, that doesn't mean we're not pressed.

There are real hardships, and the world will always offer a counter solution to biblical Christianity, and you'll have lyrically gifted genius hip hop artists like Macklemore tell you that the Bible is a paraphrase written 3500 year ago. We run to it, and we believe it, and we buy it. It's de-creating us. It really is. It's significant, and we have to see that. I think we have to read what the Lord told this church in Rome.

"After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'?"

The critical word here is *after*. This is past tense. This is not something happening in the future. This is not like, "After you get good grades at SMU, then you can get into grad school," or, "After you and your

husband save up enough money, then you can buy a nice house." This is past tense for the Hebrews, and it's past tense for us. After making purification, he sits down. What stands between that purification and him confidently sitting down is a cross where he stands as a sacrifice and a substitute, a resurrection and an ascension before he confidently sits down at the right hand of his Father in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus dies to absorb the penalty of our rebellion, the things we ran to in the past, the things we run to now, and this old identity, even this part of us that still flares up and runs, was crucified with Jesus, because Jesus was sacrificed for our sins. The Father considers those things we run to as dead in Christ. This is the gospel. When Jesus resurrects, he brings heaven and earth together, and he's the firstborn of this brand spanking new creation.

By faith, we are part of that creation when we plead his life for ours. He rescues us from the things we've been running to, the world plagued by sin and death, and we resurrect into a new world, and we are now building this new world as the people of God. We are a distinctly new creation. We have new identities, this new world that doesn't start in glory. It started with the resurrection of Jesus. It's a world undergirded in love.

It's the kingdom of God we are to build now where God is taking away the worst of us, and he's giving the best of him. For us who have fear, God is saying, "My promise through the Holy Spirit is to take your fear, to kill it, and to give you more courage than you ever thought you would know, than you ever thought you'd have." To form the very life of Jesus Christ in every one of us. That's his promise. That's why he calls us sons.

Everything that is true of Christ is true of us by faith. Jesus sits confidently in this really distinguished seat, the most distinguished seat, the right hand of God, where anyone who hopes on him as Savior and Lord can sit there too. This is why we can really sing with Isaac and with everybody else, "And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me. For I am his and he is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ."

If there is one thing I can tell you for you to take away, it's that the only means God could give to rescue you was given as your rescue before you even knew who he was. Before your parents met one another, Jesus Christ had died on the cross, and that was the means of rescue. That's why the gospel is good news. It's yours to receive. It's yours to receive and to walk in. Jesus has already made purification for sin by faith.

If you are running to religion, accept the free gift of Jesus' life. Accept that the gospel is not, "I obey; therefore I am accepted." The gospel is, "I am accepted in Christ; therefore I obey." In the fatherlessness of our generation, it's really hard to understand that a Father wants to give good gifts, but I promise you he

wants to give you good gifts. I promise you he does. He wants to give you the desires of your heart as those desires meld with his.

He doesn't want to give you a rock or a scorpion. He wants to outdo any notion you have of fatherhood by lavishing you with wonderful gifts. He's that good. That's the promise for those of us who run to religion, that we have nothing to prove and nothing to hide in the gospel. If you're running inward, if you're running away from community, away from God's people, if that has just kind of been your life for the last few years, man, this is what I can tell you.

When Jesus meets us, when he meets a person, he looks them in the eye. He takes them by the hand, and he hands them off to his church. That's what he does. We take and we welcome here at The Village Church people who have been running for a really long time, because as we have been affected by the grace of God, as we have run, as we continue to run, he woos us back here. That grace is yours tonight to respond to.

If you're running to worldly pleasures (which is all of us in some form), if you're terrified of letting people down like Jacob, you're just constantly aware of what people think of you, trying to oppress them, if things are just hard, if you're just overcome by temptation, even tonight, you know God is good, but it's harder and harder and harder to believe these things, I'm asking you to call on him to meet you and ask him to meet you now but to meet him on his terms.

Expect that there may very well be a wrestling, an exhausting kind of conversation where he presses on you and where you bring your justifications to him and where he wounds you a little bit, because he's right, and because he's always going to overpower. There is going to come a limp with that, but with the limp will come the blessing because any good father disciplines his son; he disciplines the son he loves.

Be ready for the wound because the wound comes with the blessing, if that's where you are tonight. You know, the guys I told you about on Madison Avenue only have 30 seconds in six months to get it right, to say something really clear that will get our attention, but we have God's clearest word on replay in our minds, that Jesus, who ran us down even when we were running from him, still pursues us. *Have you been rescued? Do you know the Lord? Have you trusted Christ? What are you running to? What specifically are you running to tonight? Why are you running if you've been rescued?* Let me pray for us.

Lord, thank you for your grace to us, your mercy to us. Lord, my prayer is that you would let this gospel sink down deeply in our hearts and in our minds and help us, Lord, where we have been tempted, Lord, to run to worldly pleasures and not to you, Lord, to find gratification there. Lord, we have been tempted to run to

religion and try to earn our way to you when we've just stiff-armed the community of God, because we think we know better.

I pray that you would draw us back to yourself and that you would show us this grace that is ours in Christ, Lord, that you will come after us and you will tell us difficult things, but you will promise us, Lord, that you'll never let us go. I just pray that we would feel and experience that joy tonight, Lord, just for my brothers and sisters. In Christ's name, amen.

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