

If you have your Bibles, would you go ahead and grab them? Matthew 5 is where we're going to camp out in our time together today. This is the last week of *Recovering Redemption*. It has been a 12-week series we started 12 weeks ago. I want to kind of take our last session here in this series and kind of land the plane, so very quickly, let me kind of condense the last 12 weeks into about five minutes.

What we said is we started out this series kind of looking at the reality that there are either external issues or internal issues that reveal that something is not quite right with us. Sometimes, those issues are external to us, and they make themselves manifest in relational problems or in behaviors that are detrimental to emotional health, spiritual health, physical health.

Sometimes those issues are actually just internal issues. They haven't really singled or manifested external to us. We just are kind of anxious and deal with a lot of anxiety or we tend to walk in a great deal of melancholy kind of darkness. We said those things are actually symptomatic. They're not actually the problem. They're symptoms of a greater problem, but many of us kind of set out trying to solve those things as though they are the problem.

When we do that, nothing good can come of it, because we're not treating the disease; we're actually just kind of treating the symptom. If you know anything about medicine, if you're simply treating symptoms and not the disease, you're perpetually on new meds or different meds or just trying to manage the issues. Really those things point to a greater problem. That problem mainly is that we have, because of sin, been cut off from our Creator.

The whole idea of redemption or reconciliation is to fix, to bring back into alignment, to bring back into the way it ought to be. You and I, broken away from our Creator because of sin, are on paths trying to make sense of life that aren't going to lead us into greater, richer, fuller, more pleasurable life. The lies we have all bought into is that, "I need to be a better version of me." If we had the time, almost everybody would go, "Yeah, I buy into that one all the time. Just a better version of me is going to solve it."

We've said repeatedly that if you're the problem, a better version of you simply cannot work. Then there is the great lie of our culture that we just need someone else to complete us. We're constantly looking for the person who can make us feel better, build us up, be kind of the answer, our kind of dream person.

Maybe it's not that. Maybe it's just to have a group of friends who respects and honors what we do, to get inside that inner circle of cool kids that still exists when we're 40. God help us.

If God would just mature us past junior high, that would just be an epic win. "In the end, if I could just get in that inner circle, if people would just respect what I do..." We need people to validate us, which is a type of enslavement and bondage that so many of us submit our lives to. Then there's the lie to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. This is the pursuit of worldliness that is everything from selling out to get the most stuff (all of which is the stuff of future garage sales) or pursue pleasure, but not any kind of lasting, legitimate pleasure, more temporary pleasure that almost always carries with it a type of guilt and shame.

That's a lie. Then there are plenty of us who actually try to solve our problems with external moral religion. What we really did in the whole first part of this series was go, "This isn't going to work." These things don't work because they're not solving the problem. The problem is actually your heart. It's not your actions; it's your heart. Your heart is leading to actions. If the heart doesn't change, you'll never be free. White-knuckled, "I'm not going to behave like that," is not God's desire for you in the gospel.

God has reconciled us to himself, not by demanding that we first and foremost adhere to a moral code, but rather by sending the Son of God, by sending Jesus Christ, unlike us, to live a completely perfect life. Jesus Christ was completely obedient to every command God gave him. He was other than, although he was fully man. Jesus is fully man, but his obedience was perfect. His record was spotless. No accusation could be made against him.

I'll go on record saying I don't think he bit anyone in the nursery ever. He was fully man but fully God, blameless, perfect, spotless, completely obedient, is sent to the cross, goes to the cross. On the cross of Jesus Christ, he absorbs God's wrath toward any and all of the rebellion of those who would become children of God. I said that like it must be said correctly. He absorbed every bit of the wrath of God for those who would become sons and daughters of God. Not all of God's wrath.

Some of that wrath is good and right and will be justly executed, but for those of us who are children of God, all of God's wrath is gone, absorbed fully in Christ so we are completely forgiven. Listen. You limp into this place today. You're walking in with a limp. It has been a tough week. You got busted up and gave in to some of your flesh a bit. You got a bit wrecked up. God knows. You haven't surprised him. That was taken care of, absorbed fully in the cross of Christ.

Beyond that, not only are all of our sins forgiven, past, present, and future (that's part of that reconciliation), but also Christ's obedience was imputed to us. Not only does God see us as sin-free because Christ has absorbed that sin, but we're also delighted in and loved, adopted as sons and

daughters, because the imputed righteousness of Christ was given to us, so when God sees us, he sees not only the *absence* of sin but the *presence* of Christ's perfection. That's the gospel. We have been reconciled to God.

We imperfectly execute obedience to who we are, but God's grace even covers that. You'll never meet a perfect Christian. You'll find those who are positionally perfect under the banner of God's grace. For those of you who are like, "The church is filled with hypocrites," I readily agree with you. Absolutely. That should make you feel at home. You should never be able to use that as an excuse to not plug in with the people of God. "Oh gosh! They're just hypocrites and a bunch of misfits." Yeah. It means you would fit right along with us. Come on in.

That shouldn't be a detriment. It actually should feel warm to you. "Oh. Busted-up, jacked-up people. I think I could work here." It's imperfectly executed, but it's offered to those who will, by faith, believe in this grace. Then this gospel begins to work its way through, not just the vertical relationship with our Father but now begins to work out horizontally in how we interact with one another. Christ calls to himself a group of people, and he begins to sanctify them, which means he doesn't leave us where we are, but he makes us more and more and more and more like Jesus.

Here is the big scandalous thing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. What we believe as Christians stands in stark contrast to the other world religions. We are not trying to appease God with our behavior. We're not trying to buy him off. Our mantra... We don't have a philosophy of living. Christianity is wildly different from that. We're not, "I'm going to act this way so God will accept me." It's absurd. That's the anti-gospel.

Now our lives are transformed, and morality does begin to walk in uprightness, but that's because of what God has done in our hearts. We don't do those things to get God to do something in our hearts. Ezekiel says it this way. I read this a couple of weeks ago, but I just don't think you have enough Ezekiel in your spiritual diet, so let's do some work here.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 says this. **"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."** Notice the direction this flows. It flows in the opposite direction of all other world religions.

Where other world religions would say, "If you do these things, you can be given a new heart and might be happy," Christianity flows in the opposite direction, where God says, "Despite you, I'm going to start by giving you a new heart, and then I'm going to fill you with my Holy Spirit. In my filling you with my Holy Spirit, I am going to empower and stir up in you a glad obedience to my command, because the fullness of

life and pleasure is found in obedience to my commands. I'm going to strengthen and empower you. You will not be white-knuckled in obedience. I'm going to flood you in it."

That's the promise of the gospel, and that's what makes us stand in stark contrast to the other world religions. From here, what is God leading us in obedience and sanctifying our lives leading into? That pulls us into Matthew 5, starting in verse 14. If you're not a Christian, this is more than likely going to sound horrifically arrogant to you, and I'll try to explain why it is and why it isn't.

Matthew 5:14-16 says this. **"You..."** Speaking of those who are followers of Christ, children of God. **"...are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket..."** Oh no. Right? Oh no. No, we don't. If you're not laughing, you didn't grow up in church. All right? From there, he says, **"...but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."**

Everyone, regardless of belief system, has something they believe is the light of the world. Christ, to say, "My people are going to be the light of the world." You might be able to look and go, "Man, I know Christians. I have my doubt. Haven't Christians been responsible for some huge atrocities against mankind? How in the world are Christians the solution to what is dark in the world?" I would say if you weigh any claim to be the light of the world with those goggles on, you have to come to the same conclusion.

Some will say, "No, no, no. Education is the light of the world. No, no, no. Opportunity. If you just give people opportunity. No, a capitalistic system is the light of the world. No, no, no. A governmental structure is the light of the world." All of those have been far more catastrophic lights than the light of the gospel. I'll say some things. Maybe you'll like them. Maybe you don't. I'm far more interested in what the Lord feels about me and thinks about me, so let me just say it.

Capitalism does nothing to transform hearts; it just creates the venue by which we will oppress and operate in injustice. It doesn't eradicate oppression and injustice; it just sets the grid for how our wicked hearts will practice such things. The United States, for all of God's grace on this 50-state union, is not the light of the world. Some of you are like, "Are you hating on 'murica?" No, I'm not. I love 'murica. I love it.

I love being here. I'm not worried about a mob waiting for me in the parking lot. There is a rule of law here and of freedom here that lets me freely proclaim the gospel without fear of legal repercussion. Nobody is going to cut my head off or imprison me for preaching the Bible today. Praise God for that. It's not true for

so many of our brothers and sisters all over the world. In fact, even in the recent weeks, there have been dozens if not hundreds of North Koreans drug into the streets and shot in the head for owning a Bible.

Not us. I own four, not counting what I have on my iPad. We don't live in such fear, so praise God, but we're not the answer. How is the exportation of democracy working for us? Huh? How is that seed going into the ground globally? Not well. Regardless of what you say, "This is the light," outside of the light of the gospel, it simply becomes the grid by which people will actively oppress and operate in injustice, because the issue is the heart, and those structures will not transform the heart.

You will have a more educated, more opportunity-having, more wealth-possessing ability to oppress others for your own selfish gain. It's broken. It's broken well beyond the ability of human construct to fix. Golly, even the secular Greeks knew this. That's the whole point of Prometheus. Prometheus was the god who gave man fire, and then Zeus was enraged at that and bolted him down to a rock where every day, a vulture came and ate out his liver, but then his liver would grow back, and then the vulture would come back the next day and eat it.

Zeus's beef with Prometheus was, "You gave them fire. They don't know how to use it. They'll keep trying to use it, and they'll kill themselves." Even the Greeks dialed into this idea that we can't seem to fix what's wrong, so the more we try to fix what's wrong, we just make it messier. Follow me. Somebody at one point thought it was a good idea to use asbestos to keep things warm and cool. Think about that. That's a legitimate... "Hey, we need some insulation here. Hey, let's use this." "Oh, that'll kill you."

Technology is going to create more space with us to spend more time with families and be more dialed in human interactions, isn't it? True story. I just walked in where the worship team was before I came out here. Dead silent. Every one of them was looking at their device. So I mocked them. That's what I do. I said, "Hey, why don't you do whatever you're doing?" They're like, "We're reading a book, Chandler." Seriously. Not one word. Total silence. Twelve people all looking at a device.

It has not made us better people. It has made us dumber people. Prometheus. We can't fix our own issues. Our hope is rooted in the gospel alone. When Jesus says, "You are the light of the world, he's talking about people not who have bought into civil religion or somebody who says, "I'm a conservative God-fearer," but those who have legitimately been transformed by the gospel and are disciples of Jesus Christ, not church folk, disciples of Jesus Christ.

He outlines that at the beginning. Matthew 5:2 says this. How is it possible we are the light of the world? Look at what God does in the hearts of those who believe. **"And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" I want you to notice in**

these first four that all four of these run in stark contrast and in a contrary direction to the values of our culture.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit..." *Blessed* are. Happy are the ones who understand that spiritually they're bankrupt, that they're in need of help. Blessed are the ones who are not like the Pharisees who are so self-righteous that they don't even need a God. Blessed are the ones who understand they own nothing, possess nothing, have nothing that was not given to them by God. Blessed are the ones.

I'm going to say this. I know it's a bold statement. In these first four, if there is not a pinch of it in your life, you're probably not a Christian. I know that's hard on a Sunday morning. You'd much rather have some happy sermon, but I would much rather you be blessed and saved than temporarily happy. Ultimately, if you don't have a pinch of this, if you don't have a pinch of being poor in spirit, if you don't have a pinch of, "God help me," if you don't have a pinch of that, then I'm telling you I don't think you're a believer.

I don't know how it works. If you're so awesome that you don't need a Savior then you're not saved. Then he moves on from here and says not only, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"** but, **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."** When Jesus is talking about mourning here, he's not... Oh, you lost a loved one, and now you're sad about that. That's not what's going on here.

He's saying blessed are they who mourn. Blessed are those who are aware of how they have rebelled against God, who are heartbroken in their sin, and who in their poor in spirit bankruptcy have cried out to the Father (and I love this line), because they will be comforted. I love watching Jesus Christ interact with people at the fringes of society. A woman caught in adultery, dragged naked to Jesus' feet, thrown at his feet, and the accusation is, according to the law...

This is Bronze Age awfulness. If you notice, the man wasn't dragged there. It takes two to tango. They left the man and dragged the woman. I mean, if you want to talk about a sexist, perverse way of interacting, they dragged this woman and threw her at the feet of Christ, tears, shame, undressed, naked in front of this mob. They say, "The law says we are to stone her. What do you say, Jesus?" Jesus, just as smooth as possible, starts drawing in the dirt. We never know what he's drawing, but he's drawing in the dirt.

He says, "I'll tell you what. Let the one of you who has no sin throw the first stone." The Bible says from oldest to youngest, they dropped their stones and left. Here is what happens. Jesus walks up to this sobbing woman, and he lifts up her face. He says, "Has no one condemned you? Nor do I. Go and sin no more." Don't despise conviction. It's a gift of God.

Probably eight months into my pastorate here, a family who was one of the original 168 had left. We had gotten to that size where it was hard for some of those guys who were here early on. When you've never been a part of a church larger than 400 and all of a sudden, you're running 3,000, that's just difficult. They had left, and I saw them out in town. I just don't ever want anybody to feel weird about that. My identity isn't wrapped up in that. If you land at Valley Creek or something like that, praise God.

I just literally walked over and asked them how they were doing, asked them if they had found a good home. Yeah. That was great. Praise God. "You're plugged in?" "Yeah, we're plugged in." Then I guess he, the husband, just felt like he owed me something, so he said, "Man, I just really love you. I just always feel so guilty after you preach. I just always feel so uncomfortable when I'm leaving." I was thinking, "That's good. You're saying that as if it's a bad thing. It's actually a good thing."

Listen. Conviction from God is a gift from God. To not be convicted is when you should be worried. If you can always come to church and the Word of God never bears its weight on you, you're probably in a place that isn't preaching it. The Word of God is going to bear weight on you. God should see differently than you see, shouldn't he? Shouldn't he repeatedly engage and go, "Um, I'm smarter than you on this. This way." If he doesn't, aren't you your own God?

Conviction, mourning, the ability to go, "Man, I've sinned again," should make us mourn, but there should be a tinge of sweetness in it. Why? Because he's the lifter of our head. In the middle of that, he lifts up our heads and goes, "This has already been paid for. I have not changed my mind about you, son, daughter. I have not wavered in my delight in you. This has been fully taken care of in Jesus Christ. Let's get up. Let's keep walking."

The Lord celebrates the steps of his children, even if it's two steps forward and one step back. That's still a step. He rejoices in that. **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."** Then he moves from there. **"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."** Now I think meekness gets a bad rap. I think it's completely misunderstood. Meekness does not equal passivity. In fact, it has been my understanding from the Word of God that a genuine, growing relationship with God will not lead to passivity but a type of godly, humble aggression, because you believe and trust in the promises of God.

Let me say this to you, men. If you are in the business world, in finance, in law, whatever domain you're in, I want you to shoot for the top. I want you to run companies, build empires. I want you to rise to the top and not apologize for it, but be godly as you pursue it. Don't neglect your family. Don't lean that ladder against the wrong wall. Walk in uprightness, dignity, work your tail off, and succeed. Piety does not equal passivity. The more confident we are in the Lord, the more aggressive we should be in almost all walks of life.

The difference (and where meekness comes in) is we are people who understand fully that all we have and all that has been given to us has been given to us by God. Therefore, we will be really marked by a humility and gentleness that is present because of our understanding of where all things came from. We might be good and work hard, but God blesses those who work really hard. Some guys work really, really hard, and they don't see those big things happen in their lives, but you should be hungry for it.

You should never apologize for earthly success. According to the Bible, it's granted by God to those who would put their faith and belief big upon his promises. Then he moves from there to, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." There is this interesting kind of paradox that occurs in the Word of God. That's the more of Jesus you experience, the more of him you want. There is always, in a state of satisfaction, a desire for more of what is an inexhaustible fountain of grace.

Even in my own life, I can tell you I'm a really content man. I love my house. I love my car. I love my wife. I love my kids. I love where life is right now, and I still want more, more of the Lord, to experience more of his grace, to walk in more of his power, to understand him more fully, to obey him more passionately, to follow him with greater resolve. I think regardless of life's station, this should be present.

You will be filled, but that filling will simply lead you to want more because he's inexhaustible. He's inexhaustible. The paradox is that you can be fully content and desire more. This is all over the Bible. This is David saying, "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for you." This is the apostle Paul in Philippians 3 saying, "Oh that I might know him." This is Moses saying, "Show me your glory. Let me see you more fully." There is a hunger in the hearts of God's people for more of God, even as they experience the fullness of God in a moment in their lives. There is more. There is always more.

He has the ability to save, so there is always more. He has the ability to heal. There is always more. He has the ability to reconcile. There is always more. A hunger to see God do what we know God can do both in our lives and the lives of others. **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..."** Now, I've said I think if you don't have a pinch of these first four, you're probably not a Christian. If there isn't a pinch of mourning, if there isn't a pinch of gentleness, if there isn't a pinch of hunger for the things of God, then, I love you enough to say it, you're probably not a believer.

I know. You saw you saw that terrifying sketch when you were 7 and gave your life to Christ. No fruit, no following, no real relationship with Jesus Christ. You're just trying to be good as you've defined it, but I'm telling you. Without these four things, more than likely, you are not a believer in Christ. Are you a good person? Well, I guess if you want to define goodness in human terms, maybe. My guess is you're comparing yourself to some moron you know and feeling good about yourself. That's just my guess. I could be wrong, but that's my guess.

These first four really express, in one way or another, our dependence upon God. Now, these next three move from our dependence on God to the outworkings of dependence on God. Then he said, **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."** One of the things that comes in our lowliness, in our humility, in our dependence upon God is a growing empathy and compassion for others.

The reason Christians can be said by Jesus Christ that we are going to be the light of the world is there is an intrinsic humility that is birthed in our dependence and our mourning and our hungering and thirsting for him that runs counterintuitive to the way the world operates. The world doesn't say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The world says, "Just do it. You've got this. You don't need any help. You've got it." The world doesn't mourn over its sin. It doesn't think there is such thing until something horrific happens, and then all of a sudden it's there. Just in everyday life, what is sin?

You have to get past that. Who are you? Ned Flanders? Are you kidding me right now? The world doesn't hunger and thirst for righteousness; they hunger and thirst for power, for wealth, for pleasure, to be viewed as successful. He says, "Blessed are the merciful, those who have empathy and compassion toward others." Our posture is never one of judgment; our posture is always one of empathy, compassion, patience, love. That's the default posture of the sons and daughters of God.

Then from there, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."** Pure in heart is not cardiovascular health. When he says, "Blessed are the pure in heart," it's a reference really to the core of our being. At the core of our being, we are pure in heart. This means (we have unpacked this; I've said this a couple of times now) that sometimes what I catch myself thinking scares me. Anyone else? Sometimes just in the middle of a thought, I'll catch what I'm actually thinking and be mortified about myself.

You're like, "Oh my. How dark am I that I'm having this thought right now?" I want to learn to grab those thoughts, take them captive under Christ, lay them at the feet of God, confess that I don't want those to be in there, ask for pure thoughts, ask for pure motives, as for a pure heart, lay it before the Lord, ask for his forgiveness, rest in the forgiveness I know he lavishes upon me, and move forward. I want to take every thought captive. **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

I love this next one, even though people who really excel at being obedient to this get on my nerves. Here is what it says. **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."** Let me make a distinction here. He didn't say, "Blessed are the peacekeepers," but rather, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Let me tease that out a little bit.

A peacekeeper would be someone who walked into conflict to try to resolve it. I think that's good and right, and we spent two weeks on horizontal relationships just working to this end, but a peacemaker is someone by the default position of their lives, refuses to let anyone sow seeds of disunity. A peacemaker does this kind of stuff, and that's what gets on my nerves.

If you'll say, "Hey, man. You're not going to believe what such-and-such did." They're like, "Hey, man. You're not having that conversation with me. If you have a problem with them, you need to go have a conversation with them. That's what the Bible would tell you to do. Are you trying to recruit me to be on your team against this person? Man, you're trying to put in my mind something that will rob me of the ability to give this person the benefit of the doubt, being able to see them and care for them in a way that doesn't have me in the box toward them."

"I'm not letting you have this conversation with me. We're not going to sit down every time we sit down and let you complain to me about something. You're a grown man. You're a grown woman. Work it out." That's a peacemaker. A peacemaker will risk conflict for the sake of peace. A peacemaker will go, "You're not having this conversation with me. Go work it out. Why are you whining to me about this? Go have the conversation with this man, with this woman. Stop this. It's not happening."

They're the ones, when everyone else is dogging somebody in a circle, brings up that person's good point. "Man, can you believe?" "I know! I can't believe that." "Yeah, but did you guys see how he treated that. That's amazing. I love that that's in him." Just an awkward grenade right in the middle of that conversation. Everyone was just feeling so self-righteous, and then all of a sudden it was exposed that no one was self-righteous except the peacemaker. Try it. Watch how awkward things get when you bring up the strength of someone when everyone is dog-piling on their weaknesses.

Blessed are the peacemakers, not the peacekeepers. That's a good, beautiful thing to pursue, but the peacemakers. "I'm going to make a little peace here. I think their awesome." *Boom!* Awkward... It takes a turn here. It takes a turn, and it's one we need to talk about. Verse 10. **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** That's a wild turn, right? You want to talk about counterintuitive. "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness."

You have to hear this. It is not when you are persecuted for being a moron. If you are going 90 through a school zone and got pulled over, that's not persecution. That's justice. How does this play itself out in the real world? Well, I'll give you real examples. On four or five different occasions of my 11 years here, godly men have lost well-paying jobs because at work, the expectation was and the culture set was to do something that is a little bit illegal or a little bit in the gray for the good of the company. They refused, and they were demoted and fired for it.

You might be saying, "Well, how could Jesus say, 'Blessed is the man who gets fired or demoted from his job,' when he has a family to provide for?" Well, a couple of things. I'll tell you how in every one of these cases they were blessed. One, they got to put their head on their pillow at night with a clear conscience. In my experience, there are few things that pay as well as that. The second thing, as they watched the church rally around them, love them, care for them, and provide for them, help them find jobs until they were back up on their feet. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, not those who are persecuted for being foolish, but persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom.

It's like he doesn't want to move off of this point too quickly, because look where he goes next. **"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you..."** What's that word? **"...falsely..."** That becomes huge. Look back at your Bible. Let's read that again. **"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."**

This is a difficult passage. "Blessed are you when you are reviled." I don't even know what that is, but it sounds awful. When you are reviled and when people say things against you falsely, blessed are you. Let me just have a frank conversation. It's church. It's a good place for it. If you're not dialed in to the growing hostility and marginalization of Christianity from mainstream culture, you're just not paying attention. We are witnessing the last breaths of Christendom, and praise God for that.

For the last 100 plus years, there has been what a buddy of mine calls civil religion, which basically means, "Yeah, we're American. We're Christian." That's kind of the default, conservative, Christian value, religious, right kind of ridiculousness. It means our churches have been filled with a ton of people who have no real dedication to Jesus Christ but find it un-American to not be there, and we're watching that die fast, and it will be good, but it puts us in a new place, a place none of us have actually experienced in our lifetime.

That's marginalized and pushed to the fringes, and already the broad brushstrokes about us are not good. If I can just take one subject... I'm not teaching on this subject; I'm using it as an example. As legislature begins to be passed on same-sex marriage and the definition of marriage and all of that, if you're listening to the rhetoric, here is the accusation against us, broad-stroked, as Christians. We are bigots. We are intolerant. We are the American Taliban. We are right up there with the KKK and the Civil Rights Movement trying to deny people of rights that are God-given. Those are accusations being made against us.

Look at me. They had better be false accusations. I don't pretend that our view will ever be understood by those outside the kingdom of God, but we are a people commanded by God to be marked by love, compassion, patience, mercy, and...hear me...hospitality. Look at me. You don't catch sin from sinners. Do

you hear me? I know some of you, in the attempt to protect your family and to make sure you guys stay purer than you actually are, build walls.

You don't want your kids around those kinds of kids. You don't want to be around those kinds of people. You *are* those kinds of people! It's God's grace that rescues from that. Stop that nonsense. We don't build walls. We open doors. My house is open, and my neighbors can make accusations against me, but they better be false. I want them just to be confused. I just want my neighbors to be so ridiculously confused. "This guy is a bigot, but he keeps inviting me over for dinner. That guy makes me sick, and he keeps bringing me presents on my birthday and Christmas. That guy is like the American Taliban, but he sure is friendly." I just want that type of confusion.

There has to be wisdom. I'm not telling you to operate in a way that lacks wisdom, but brother and sister, God has put us here for the purpose of being the light of the world, and you don't hide it under a bush. Oh no. You don't do that. No, we engage. We encourage. We open up our home. There is some risk involved in that. Be wise, but trust God in those things. We've had people in our house for dinner. In fact, my wife baptized a woman just a couple of weeks ago who was (God bless her) just such a train wreck.

She was all over the map in regard to... She literally prototype who would probably be infuriated with Christianity and Christians, and sure enough, as we had conversation, story after story of being judged harshly, of being ostracized, of being made to feel worthless was present, and some of that was on her. It's not always on God's people. Sometimes unregenerate people don't know what to do with conviction. They don't feel it as sweet; they see it as judgment.

In fact, some of you here today feel judged, and no one has actually judged you. You're judging you right now. We're not judging you. In the middle here, we saw the woman just start spending time. Good Lord, she like lives at my house now. She's home more than I am, it feels like. It has been a beautiful kind of thing. Our doors are just open. No, you can't come over, but our doors are open.

In fact, the more jacked up you are, the more I feel drawn for you to come in and see what life looks like in glad submission to Jesus Christ where we laugh a lot, where we enjoy good food, where we enjoy good wine, but don't do it in a way that is outside of the bounds of the Word of God, and let you see the life that is made available to those who would put their trust in Jesus Christ, and see our imperfections. God loves imperfect people. That's why dressing up like you're pretty when you're not isn't helpful.

The labels will be put on us at this point. It's over. This is how we will be labeled. It will get worse. If you can't handle this label and don't want to be viewed like this, then you're going to have to go underground with your faith, which means I don't think you have any. May the accusations and the labels be false. Look

how the Lord wants to encourage you after this. Verse 12. **"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven..."** Which is great, but I love this little line. **"...for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

He's going, "Hey, they're going to falsely label you. Cool. They did that to Isaiah. You guys have something in common now. Oh, they're going to falsely misrepresent you. Hey, you and Jeremiah would be boys. You guys could sit around and talk about what it's like to be ostracized and be pushed to the margins." Jesus will also say, "Oh, I'm well acquainted with that." Was Jesus not repeatedly misrepresented, repeatedly accused of things that were absurd? There will be nothing you can do about the accusation. Just let it be false accusation.

Rejoice and be glad, for great is our reward in heaven. We are a people who have been put in a precarious spot to be against the world for the world. That's precarious, and yet it's our calling. Now, how do we live out being the light? There are two ways. There is an individual way, and then there is kind of a corporate way or an organic way and an organizational way. Let me do it this way.

First and foremost, you are lights in the darkness by following the aptitudes that led you into the career you're in. This isn't universally true, but by and large, our aptitudes drive what we do because people like to do things that are easier for them and that they like to do. The reason I say that drives most of us is that it's simply not true for all of us. I know that, because I've seen the first couple episodes of American Idol several times. I know there are people who lack aptitude but still have passion in a distinct area of weakness.

I'm telling you community would solve that. Someone has not loved them well that they have just come and said, "Understand your passion, but you're good at math, brother. You're good at math. Stop this. I don't want to be this guy, but I feel like before you go on this show, listen to me. No. Math. Business. Go." All right? So we follow our aptitudes. Our aptitudes lead, more than likely, into our career choice. Now that we've been placed within a domain of society, we have been placed around coworkers. We live in neighborhoods.

We have been placed there as light so that in one sense, our light shines in individual, one-on-one relationships as we share the gospel with those without don't know Jesus Christ, but it also is bigger than that, in that within the domain God has placed us, we're able to systematically push back systemic darkness. Let me give you my favorite example.

International Justice Mission is an unbelievable organization out there. Gary Haugen leads that. He was the lead investigator for the United Nations for the genocide in Rwanda. Also a very godly man. When he

walked in and saw all that had occurred in that genocide, his heart was pierced, and he wanted to do more than just exercise his brilliance in investigation and his brilliance in international law.

He built an organization around other investigators and other lawyers that is a global organization that fights against sex traffic, that fights against slavery, where people in India and Africa are actually chained up in a rock quarry where they work 18 hours a day with little to no pay, hardly fed. Stuff you think is long gone that is actually ever-present.

In fact, I was having a conversation with our member just a few minutes ago in this very room who was having a conversation with a young Filipino woman who actually was brought over and prostituted out. If you want to pretend like this isn't happening all around us, I think you're closing your eyes to some very easy things to see.

Now a group of lawyers and special investigators, believers in Christ are using the domain God put them in to push back what is dark in the world. Whether or not you're in the realm of education, the realm of finance, the realm of government and politics, the realm of agriculture, the realm of art, God has uniquely wired you and placed you to share the gospel with individuals and to push back what is dark in the world systemically through the domain in which he has placed you. This is how we shine as lights individually. This is organic.

Organizationally, as a church, here is what we try to do. I don't want to shake my fist at the darkness. I don't know where that gets us, but I do want to plant as many lights as possible. Lighting candles at a Christmas Eve service. I want to spend our resources, our energies, and our monies in building out and planting gospel outposts all over this city and all over the world. We do that via campuses. We have four campuses now. We'd probably like to have five or six.

We're working hard to try to figure out a building in Plano. We have thousands of you driving over from Plano. We'd just much rather put a little sweet thing out there for you and just let you be in your neighborhood and not drive so far. We primarily do this via church plants. We've planted dozens and dozens and dozens of churches, not just in the metroplex but all over the world because we believe in lighting candles among the darkness. This is how organizationally as a church, we'll be lights in the darkness. Let me show you a quick video on how we church plant and how you can be involved in that.

[Video]

Matt Chandler: When I first became the pastor of The Village Church, one of the things that became clear as I was looking through all the documents that were handed to me was that The Village Church had been planted by Lakeland Baptist Church that is literally two exits down from us. Lakeland Baptist Church was planted by First Baptist Church of Lewisville. Really we begin to see this line form that I believe you can trace all the way back to the book of Acts.

The primary way God has let the gospel penetrate and permeate throughout the world is through churches that plant churches. We want to be a part of what God is doing and actively be a church that plants other churches. We do that really in three ways. We send through our sending programs. We want to train young men and women for the role of gospel ministry and want to send them out from The Village Church to plant churches.

Then we partner with other organizations that do this well. Thrive in the City is an organization that does residencies for those interested in planting in urban centers, and Fellowship Associates is another partner that also does residencies for people who want to plant really anywhere. It's not a specialized residency like Thrive is, but it's a good, solid residency.

From there, we want to partner with Acts 29, which is a church-planting network I currently am president over. We want to partner. We not only want to send, but we want to partner with others who are doing this well. Finally, we want to resource church planters. We're going to do that financially with money. We're going to do that in regard to giving them the things we have written and created as The Village church as a means of using those things in their plants.

Ultimately, we want to, at some level, coach church planters to mature and grow as gospel ministers. Finally, and one of the things I want to plead with you on this to be more and more involved in what God is doing through The Village Church in the area of church planting. Really you can do this in three ways. You can give. You can give money specifically to a church planter or to a church plant or you can go.

We have a history of this now. Some of you have actually moved your family and moved, transferred jobs so you might be a part of church plants we're doing in the city or to the ends of the earth. Really the final way you can participate all the more in church planting is an area we can all get better at and all be involved in, and that's just being prayerful about church plants, church planting, and about God raising up laborers for the harvest.

Maybe your home group adopts a specific planter, or maybe your home group just adopts a time for you to pray about church planting. My hope is in the years to come that we might be more and more and more

known as a church that plants churches and church that is passionately about other gospel outposts being planted all over the world. To this end we pray and labor. Bless you.

[End of video]

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