

## **Take Heart (Part 1) – God's Glory as Our Courage**

Matt Chandler – June 5, 2016

---

How are we? Doing well? Excellent. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We'll be in Romans, chapter 11. If you don't have a Bible with you, why don't you grab one of those hardback black ones somewhere around you? As always, I want you to see that I'm not making any of this up. We're actually just reading it out of the Bible.

I'm glad to be with you today. You've had seven days now to sit on the source idols, if you were here last week. How many of you are comfort, if you're willing to confess? You can go ahead and get your hands up. I know this is uncomfortable for you. Okay, how many of you would go, "No, it's not comfort for me; I'm more control"? Okay, how many of you want to control the comfort? Yeah. What about power? How many of you would be power?

How many, lastly, would say, "No, definitely approval"? Or how many of you would go, "Gosh, yes, on all four"? This is a fun exercise to keep teasing at it and considering it again. If you weren't here last week, you can listen to that online. I want to start today a three-week series on Christian courage, and I want to try to explain why I want to address this subject and why I think it's time for us to have this conversation.

You and I are in the twilight, or what appears to be the twilight, of a most unusual period of human history. What I mean by that is if you consider the people of God throughout the history of humanity, we are rarely at the center of cultural and political power. We are almost always at the margins of society. In fact, our very roots in the first through third centuries were to be almost stomped out by the Roman Empire, fed to lions, put in prison, crucified upside down, boiled alive.

If you consider the people of God in the Old Testament and then the people of God right up until around AD 380, we are in the margins. We're in prisons, and we're being killed. Our stuff is being plundered. This is our story until AD 380. In AD 380, Theodosius the First, emperor of Rome, named Christianity as the Roman Empire's official religion. Then 12 years later, in 392, Theodosius the

First outlawed all pagan religions and effectively set up a marriage between the church and the state.

Historians would call this period of time, starting at around AD 380 to AD 392 up until just a couple of decades ago, *Christendom*. When you think about the Western world, what you're thinking about is Christendom. As Christendom forms, there are some things that start to happen. Progressively, as generations moved forward, you began to get what at least was considered a Christianized civilization.

Then the world began to be broken into categories. There was Christendom, and then there were the heathens. You began to see things happen that had never happened before and, honestly, ran contrary to the Word of God. I'll name some of those, just to kind of lay before you what all happened and maybe give us a sense of what we're currently in the twilight of. By the way, as I say this, I am not mourning the loss of Christendom. I am welcoming its death. There's way too much wrong with it. So much of it is unbiblical.

One of the primary things that happened is when Christendom was established, right around probably 400, the church moved from the margins and became the center of political and cultural power. The church that had always been marginalized now sits at the center. It is now the church that decides the ethics for country. It is now the church that decides the political temperature. It's the church that unpacks... We bear our weight on culture in a profound and powerful way.

In fact, even political power was seen as divinely authenticated. This is the weight of the church being put at the center. Some other things that started happening that hadn't happened before is Sunday became an official day of rest and mandatory church going, and there were repercussions if you didn't go to church. I'm not talking about police officers would kick open your door and arrest you if you weren't at Sunday school. I'm saying there were cultural ramifications for not belonging to a church.

If you would consider even in the 40s and 50s in the United States... Some of you were there. If you were a businessman, smart business was that you would be a member of the First Baptist Church or the First Methodist Church. If you wanted to be a good businessman in your community, it was seen as upright and outstanding for you to belong to a church. If you didn't belong to a church, you might belong to the heathens, and I'm not going to let you fix my muffler. That was kind of the air we breathed.

We saw in this period of time, as the church became more centralized and political and cultural power, a dividing of what we'll call *laity* and *professional ministers*. That didn't exist in the first century. The first few centuries, what made Christianity spread so rapidly through the ancient world... By the way, Rodney Stark would say that by AD 350, 51 percent of the Roman Empire, 31.7 million people, claimed Christ as King.

In fact, what we've learned historically is the more a government tries to subject and destroy Christianity, the more it flourishes. The more it is given friendly quarter, the more it grows weak and stale and soft. What we saw in the fourth through eighth centuries is a massive division between laity and professional ministers.

What was once very faithful businessmen, businesswomen, welders, carpenters, experts in construction and architecture, being the missionary force that proclaimed and heralded the gospel and made disciples, now all of a sudden it was on the professionals to do that, and it was your job to just enjoy the skills of the professionals. That's certainly not how the Scriptures unpack it, and it's certainly not what God has been up to throughout the ages. It's just unfortunately a result of Christendom.

Christendom reigned supreme for 1,600 years until cracks began to form in its might. Those cracks were owing primarily to the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers, if I could quote James K.A. Smith, considered mankind as brains on a stick. That's the best way to think about the Enlightenment. We're just brains on a stick. There's nothing that's supernatural. In fact, if you can't taste it or see it or touch it or hear it or smell it, it doesn't exist.

They were very anti-supernatural, very much mankind. The solution of all mankind's ills can be found in the mind of man, as the mind of man fixes what's wrong. So throw out the Greeks and what they thought. Throw out human history up until the Enlightenment and what actually worked for human flourishing. It's a brand new day, and man will think himself out of his problems. I always love the question, "How's that working for us?" It's a great diagnostic question. The answer is, "It's not going well."

What happened in the Enlightenment is a couple of things. The church was no longer considered the guardian of absolute ethical behavior. For the first time in over 1,500 years, the culture at large

says, "The church doesn't get to decide what's right and wrong. We get to decide for ourselves what's right and wrong." That's a massive shift due to the Enlightenment.

A second shift is the church is seen as just another institution that purveys goods and services. Rather than the church being something we give our lives to, the church now becomes this kind of thing that's there, and maybe we do it and maybe we don't. It's like another leisurely activity. It just depends on what I have going on that weekend. Devotion to the gathering of God's people and the worship of God's name becomes just an add-on to the rest of life.

No longer does it sit as the central tenet of what forms us as people. Now it's just like, "I don't know. We're not doing anything on Saturday and, man, they have services on Saturday. Here's what we could do, baby. We could just drop the kids off and hang out. The music there is good. That guy sometimes is funny. He might go off on a rant, but we can just turn him off and look at our phones. It's like a little date night for us."

The church is no longer that place where we come and consider and marvel at the beauty of God. It's all about marketing. It's about self-help. It's about making us feel better about ourselves. What ends up happening is the church becomes kind of a competitive marketplace. Rather than being on mission and longing to see people come to know Christ, we're simply reshuffling the deck in a given city. "Let me show you why *our* church is better than *that* church so maybe you'll join *my* church."

That's what ends up happening. You get into all sorts of silly things. I'm not trying to dog it as much as I'm trying to say that we're products of the Enlightenment. Church, rather than being very serious, sober, "Let's consider the magnitude of God's might and beauty," it becomes about man. "Here are seven ways for *this* to never happen to you. Here are four ways for *this*," all of which are usually lies.

What do you do if you hear a sermon that there are five ways to remove your doubt and you do all five things and your doubts have remained? They *will* remain, because faith is a wrestle with doubt. What do you do then? Your doubt has gone big now. I mean, you think you were doubting *before* the series on doubt. You are definitely doubting *after* the series on doubt that was supposed to remove your doubt. That's how we jam ourselves up. Everything kind of becomes a show that's more about man than it is about God.

In this competitive marketplace, we do things like this. "We're just going to nail children's ministry. In fact, here's what you're going to do. Just sit back. You can press a button on your chair. It leans you back. Press a button. Mocha pops up, and then here's what we're going to do for you. We got this from Disney.

We're going to scan your retina at your chair, and then your kid will be shot through a fun tube into your car so you don't even have to pick him up. You just walk out, and your kid is waiting for you in the car. Your car is on. The temperature is like you like it. We found that in a survey. Your kid is there with a Slurpee cup with a Bible verse on it, and they're in." If you can do that, praise God, but it's a product of the Enlightenment. It has nothing rooted in Scripture that is true, right, or good or that forms you in the way that God wants to form you.

One of the bigger things that has happened... Here's the basis of the sermon. Very, very rapidly the church has been removed from its center of cultural and political power. By the way, I wasn't a big fan of that to begin with, but it has been removed from that and pushed to the margins. It's very difficult for those of us who have been Christians for a while to go from a place of favor to foolishness in less than a decade.

Let me give you an illustration of this. My point is that the church is once again being pushed out into the margins. I think the church thrives there. I think a lot of people claim to be Christians who aren't Christians. They're Christians because they were born in San Antonio or their parents went to church. There are these reasons that they're Christians that don't have anything to do with a life submitted to Jesus Christ. I think this will solve that.

The best thing you can do for someone who thinks they're a Christian and is not is help them understand that they're not. Marginalization will help people realize, "No, I don't really care for Jesus. I just thought church was fun. It was just a hobby of mine. Christ didn't have my heart. I just found a place where I could play volleyball with other singles." Marginalization is that space where we find out where our loves really lie.

An illustration of how radical and how fast this thing has moved is Truett Cathy and his son Dan Cathy (Chick-fil-A, for those of you who don't know their names) are devout godly men. I'm saying "devout godly men" because I'm trying to separate them out from Christendom that would just say, "Hey man, if you were born into a Christian family, you're a Christian." That's not how Christianity works. These two men love Jesus Christ.

I'm not saying that because I read their biography. They give away millions and millions and millions of dollars to all sorts of needs all over the world. In fact, about eight years ago, I was in China with a group of other men looking to help and do ministry in China. We ran into some men and women, some executives from Chick-fil-A, who were in that part of Asia building schools and helping little girls get educated in a way that they weren't being educated in the current climate.

Chick-fil-A was giving away tens of millions of dollars to see little girls educated in China. These aren't the antichrists. Because Dan Cathy is the CEO of one of the more successful fast foods... It is fast food. I know it's the healthy choice fast food. Because he's the CEO, president of one of the more successful fast food companies in the world, from time to time he is interviewed by both Christians and secular publications alike.

In a Christian publication, he was asked a question, and here's how he answered about their business model. "We are very much supportive of the family, the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. We give God thanks for that. We know it might not be popular with everyone, but thank the Lord we live in a country where we can share our values and operate on biblical principles."

That answer led to a ton of outrage. "How dare he?" When there's outrage, there's always a request for a follow-up interview. My coaching to you, don't ever do the follow-up interview. You're not going to win it. "Let me explain." Just take your beating and move on. There is no explanation in the current climate. We live in a world now that to disagree with anyone's lifestyle means we either hate them or we're afraid of them.

That is categorically untrue, but they are the only categories the secular mind seems to be embracing at the point. If I don't fully affirm everything about your life, it must be that I hate you, which is absurd. Dan did the second interview to a specific... Let's talk about Chick-fil-A for a second, and not about their chicken, which is delicious. There's some sort of addictive chemical in there that makes me crave it fortnightly.

You do not have to be a Christian to work for Chick-fil-A. You do not have to be heterosexual to work for Chick-fil-A. There is no doctrinal statement aligned with employment at Chick-fil-A. You cannot be fired for not being a Christian. You cannot be fired for being a homosexual. This is not

what this was about. In the follow-up interview he was asked a very specific question, and here was his answer.

"I think we are inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at him and say, 'We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage.' I pray God's mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think that we have the audacity to define what marriage is all about." Whether you agree with this statement or not, I think it's a secondary matter.

He makes a theological case there, and he's honestly making some arguments from anthropology. He's saying that as long as mankind goes back, human flourishing exists because of *this*, and we're now saying, "No, no, no. We have progressed to the point where we can look back on thousands and thousands of years of successful culture-building and say, 'No longer works. We have to do it our way.'" He's saying that's a really arrogant place to stand.

Now whether you think that was courageous or foolish, we're in a capitalistic society, and you can not get his chicken if you don't like it. I would never tell you otherwise. You don't like that? Then don't buy his chicken. That's what it means to live in an economy that's run by capitalism. It means people vote with their wallets. People will let you know. If he wants to step into these waters...

I mean, why can't that guy just make some chicken and shut his mouth? A couple of reasons. First, he was asked a direct question in an interview, so he answered it. Then he was asked another direct question based on that interview, and he answered it. He's not picketing. People who want to boycott Chick-fil-A... I don't mind it. I'm not going to do it. That chicken is delicious.

What struck me as interesting was the political game that happened after that. Let me give you some examples. Rahm Emanuel, the mayor of Chicago, said, "Chick-fil-A values are not Chicago values." I've been to Chicago. I tend to agree with him. James Kenney is a Philadelphia councilman, and he called that comment hate speech. Boston's mayor, Thomas Menino, vowed to block any attempts to open a Chick-fil-A in Boston.

I'm wondering what kind of power mayors have these days. Can you just do that? "No Chick-fil-A in Boston." Do you really have that kind of power? Chicago alderman Joe Moreno said he would deny Chick-fil-A a permit if they tried to open a restaurant in his neighborhood. San Francisco's mayor Ed Lee (this is my favorite) said he recommended that Chick-fil-A not try to come closer than 40 miles' distance from San Francisco.

That sounds like a kid I beat up in high school. "I just dare you to come within 40 miles of San Francisco." You're like, "You have barricades out there? Tanks? How are you going to stop Chick-fil-A from selling chicken 40 miles outside of San Francisco?" My point is 10 years ago, neither of those statements would have even made the news. We probably wouldn't know anything about Chick-fil-A other than their delicious chicken.

The climate has changed. The culture has changed. The church once again is being pushed into the margins, and it's not easy for Christians to go from favor to being perceived as fools in a couple of decades. To go from being honorable to being seen as bigots. That's a pretty fast turn for one lifetime, much less for a couple of decades. So I want to talk about Christian courage, because the temptation in this environment... And we're in Dallas. You're not up in the Northeast or the Northwest. You're in Dallas.

Even in Dallas you're beginning to get a sense of the acidity of all of this. You're hearing how we're talked about. You're not really given a chance to explain. We're kind of called bigots or put in this category of those who hate, and you don't really get a chance to defend yourself and go, "That's simply not true." That day seems to be gone.

I want to talk about Christian courage, because the temptation in this environment is twofold. The temptation is to withdraw and privatize. Are you tracking with that? In this environment, where there's hostility toward those who would be bold in their faith, we tend to withdraw. "Well, let's just not talk about these things."

Then we tend to privatize. What I mean by *privatize* is Christians aren't going to go, "Well, forget Jesus, then." No, no, no. We'll just go, "That'll just be about me and my house. We'll serve the Christ, but we won't talk about that outside." We compartmentalize. Work is work, home is home, and church is church. Jesus becomes the God of church time, but he is not the Lord and Savior of our entire world. He is not the sun around whom we orbit but, rather, is a few hours a week. The Lord would call us out of such nonsense and into compassion, grace, love, and boldness.

So I want to start three weeks on the topic of courage. When I talk about *courage*, here's the definition I'm using. This is from a man named Ambrose Redmoon, who wrote a book called *No Peaceful Warriors*. Here's his definition. I love the idea of courage in the book. "Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

I think in our minds what we can do at times is think that courage is the lack of fear, but that's not true. If there's not fear, there can't be courage. In fact, you have to have fear to be courageous. If there's no fear, then you're not courageous; you just might be crazy. Real courage is when you feel anxiety, you feel fear, you are worried, but in your judgment there's something more valuable, something greater than that fear. So you step into the fear, trusting and with great boldness, believing that what you're stepping into is greater than what you're afraid of.

This is what we want to talk about. What's the basis of our courage? What are we basing our courage on? Historically, with the culture behind us, the moral majority, Christians were able to stand boldly, knowing that the culture had their back. We could say, "This is a really bad thing," and 90 percent of the culture would go, "Yeah, you're right. It *is* a bad thing." Those days are long gone. We are no longer a moral majority. We are actually a minority.

Even among the churches, you're seeing more and more cave to the pressure of a culture that would redefine everything humanity has called sane for thousands and thousands of years. So what will be the basis of our courage when we are *not* seen as the sane ones, *not* seen as the compassionate ones, *not* seen as loving or gracious, because to disagree is to hate? What will be the basis of our courage when much is on the line and we will find few friends to stand with us?

I'm glad you asked, because that's the whole point of my sermon. Romans, chapter 11. Let's look at this. To set the stage on what we're about to read, Paul, who hated Jesus Christ and hated Christians, had set his face to destroy them, was single-handedly responsible for the torment of thousands of Christians in the first century. The Bible is very clear. Paul, per his own biography, is very clear that he was a murderer, a torturer, and a violent blasphemer.

That's his own testimony per his own pen, yet he becomes a Christian and then becomes one of the greatest missionaries the Christian faith has ever known and wrote much of our New Testament, being led by the Holy Spirit. In fact, there's a whole section of the New Testament called the Pauline Epistles, and those were letters Paul wrote to churches he planted. He's writing to the church at Rome, and this is long before AD 380 and long before AD 392. This is the period of time in which we're being fed to lions. Our stuff is being stolen simply because we are Christians. We are being put in prison. We are being beaten and tortured.

So to build the courage of the church at Rome, who certainly were feeling the temptation to privatize, if not bail outright on Christianity, to withdraw and just be quiet, to no longer share the gospel with their neighbors and their coworkers and those they played with... To fight that temptation, Paul turns their eyes upwards. I believe he wants to accomplish two things here. Look at verse 33.

**"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."**

Now two things Paul is accomplishing as he writes to the church at Rome to bolster their courage in the face of marginalization and oppression. By the way, I don't think things are as bad for us (nor will they be in the next five years, I don't believe) as they were for this church receiving this, but it is possible, and we *are* in the twilight of the favor we've enjoyed.

Paul starts to turn their eyes upwards to consider God rather than man. I think one of the reasons that in this season evangelicals are going to find themselves in so much trouble is the Enlightenment had us talking to you as though church is about you and this whole thing is about you rather than turning our eyes to the King of glory and recognizing it's all about him. Confidence is found not in us but in him.

Paul begins to draw some distinctions between us and him. He says, "Oh, the depths of his riches..." We'll just camp at his riches for a little bit. Paul is teasing out now for their good, "Let's talk about the differences between you and God. Let's start with riches." Now why would you start with riches and things you might own or have possession of?

Because in this period of time (we know this from the book of Hebrews) to be a Christian is to have all of your stuff stolen from you right in front of the authorities and have the authorities do nothing about it. You can read about that in Hebrews 11 and 12. In this space, he says, "Okay, let's consider your wealth versus the wealth of God."

When he talks about the riches of God's grace and the depth of that wealth, here's something to consider. You and I, as human beings made in the image of God, can only create what we can afford and what actually exists and we have access to. Right now, my wife is remodeling our house. She is

restrained in this remodeling project by two things. The first is finances, what we can actually afford.

The second way we're restrained is by raw material. We can only build, we can only create... She can only do what we actually have resources to build. She needs two-by-fours. She needs sheetrock. I'm sure there's some sort of weird metal that there's only a little bit left of on earth that's being shipped in from some far-off country to serve as a light switch or something. I don't know what all is going on in there. I just laid the budget, and I'm praying to God it works.

We're constrained in what we can build by what we have resources for. That's not how God works. I don't know how you think about the creation narrative, but the creation narrative is not that God was in heaven and it was really packed and he needed a place to put all that stuff, so he threw it out into the universe. No, there was nothing until God told there to be something. That's crazy!

God just said, "Let us create," and the word that spoke that into being was so powerful the universe continues to expand in every direction to this day. There weren't a bunch of stars in heaven he needed to get rid of. He just told there to be stars and there were. I don't know how you're rolling. I don't know what kind of paper you have, but none of you can do that. I don't care if you're a billionaire in this room.

Speak a boat into existence right now. You can't. You're constrained. By what? How much cash you have and whether or not that boat exists or you need to have it built. Even if you have it built, it has to be built with materials that have to be there. It's only God who doesn't need that and can just speak as much as he wants or anything he wants into existence without any raw material. He just tells it to be. That's a kind of wealth that you and I will never know. It's a wealth that belongs to God and is a part of the inheritance of the saints.

Paul says, "Get your eyes off you. Get your eyes on God, and consider what things could look like 10,000 years from now." Here's something I've thought as I've read through this. Paul is writing to believers in Rome who cannot fathom the end of the Roman Empire. They can't fathom that Rome will ever be overthrown. They're at the pinnacle of their might in this period of time, and yet just a couple of months ago I spent 12 euros to walk through their ruins.

God, who sees all and knows all, is managing things in ways we can't comprehend. He's playing the long game, and we live in a culture that doesn't value the long game. We want everything now, and

it had better come quick. That's not how the Lord works. The Lord will not become a slave to our cultural nuances. He won't. He's just too big for that.

The wealth of God is tremendous, so Paul is trying to encourage the hearts of his people. "It doesn't matter what they take from you. It doesn't matter if you end up broke and in prison. The wealth of God is immense and eternally yours." That's not all he wants them to wonder about and be in awe of. Not only does he say, "Oh, the depths of his riches," but then he moves to, "Oh, the depths of his wisdom and his knowledge."

This is important too. If you're marginalized or oppressed, this is of massive importance to us. Here's why. If you find yourself in prison, if you find yourself bearing the brunt of being on the margins, then you can lose hope. So Paul circles back around and says, "No, no, no. God knows what he's doing." This is the most un-Enlightenment-based statement I'll make all day, and it's a big one.

We, because we are finite beings, are in a given location and in a given time. You and I, 2016, Dallas, Texas. That's where we are. It has its own cultural nuances. It has its own feel and vibe. It's not the same feel as other places, but it's us. It's where we are. Right now we are sitting at The Village Church and we're listening to a sermon at The Village Church. All of those things are true about our given context.

That is not how God works. God is not inside time; he is outside of time, so he sees it all in a way that's seamless and doesn't register with us. I'll make this statement, and you can kind of feel your brain quiver and try to grab ahold of it. The future is not something God knows about; it's a place that he *is*. He is all there in the way that he is all here in the way that he is all in the farthest reaches of the universe.

God is outside of time, and in being outside of time, his wisdom and knowledge, quoting this text, is inscrutable. It can't be questioned, because we don't have enough information to ask the right questions. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, would say that to be human is to have your face pushed up against a stained glass window. You see some color, but you see a lot of broken glass. It is only given to God and those who are with him to be back far enough to see the whole window.

A more modern illustration, one that I've tried to use with you often, is to scrutinize God, to shake your fist at him, is to actually step into a movie that's three or four hours long for two seconds, step

back out, and then lecture the director on the storyline. That's what it's like. You just don't know, and he does.

This is Paul's way of saying, "God knows. He has not abandoned you. He has not forgotten you. The faithfulness of saints in the first, second, and third centuries laid rise to a great revival among the Roman Empire that if you follow the timeline led to the fall of the Roman Empire. See, any nation that sets its face to destroy God's people in God's time vanishes, and guys like me pay 12 euros to marvel at the jail cell that you put saints in a couple of thousand years ago.

That's not all he's trying to accomplish. He's not just building their courage around God's wealth and God's knowing and not abandoning. Then he wants to do what really is the unforgivable sin in our current cultural context. It's to make them feel lower and smaller and weaker. Isn't it counterintuitive that if people are going through a difficult thing the last thing you would want to do is make them feel weaker and smaller?

In God's economy, to lack confidence in yourself is to grow confidence in God. That's where I think the church made such a big mistake these last couple of hundred years, where things have turned on us. We're all just about, "You can do it. You're so great." Now what? We're trying to run a marathon on cotton candy. We're trying to be bold in the day of war eating Twinkies. It doesn't work that way.

We just have this vacuum. We don't want to talk about God. "Tell me about me. Tell me how I can be awesome." That's not how God bolsters the courage of his people. He reminds them of their weakness. Let's look at verse 34. **"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"**

Let's talk about it. There are two things. You would think this is not how you talk to people who are having a difficult day. He asks questions that aren't answered in the gathering. When this letter is read to the church in Rome, he doesn't get to that part and say, "Hey, who has known the mind of the Lord and been his counselor?" and had somebody go, "Ooh, wait, I did!" That's not what happened. "Or who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid?" Nobody is saying, "It was me who did that."

We know some of the mind of the Lord. God reveals himself to us in nature. He reveals himself primarily through the Word of God, but no one in here knows enough to counsel him. You have

never said to God, "Hey, what about..." and him go, "Oh man, thank me for you, because I was really tied up in this Middle East mess and totally dropped the ball on that. Thank you for reminding me. I am back now. I've got an angel on that. That should get knocked out in the next week or two." That's not how this works.

The second thing to consider, and I'm going to say it harshly and then make it sweeter. Maybe you think that's a bad play, but I'm just going to try to be faithful to the text. God doesn't owe you anything. You have nothing to give to him that is not already his. My birthday is a couple of weeks away. My kids are going to buy me presents. I will not be a richer man in regard to wealth because of those gifts, because those gifts will be bought with my money.

My kids will go to their mother and ask their mother for money to buy me a present, and my wife will give them money from our joint account to buy me presents. My heart will be full that they thought of me, and it's so sweet, but I'm going to be out 60 bones on that. I'm just going to be straight with you. I'm going to be out 60 bones on those birthday gifts to me.

Maybe you remember the band Sixpence None the Richer. They took their band name from C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* when he was making this point. To try to give anything to God is like getting sixpence from your grandfather and buying him a gift and bringing it back to him. The grandfather is sixpence none the richer. It's this idea that everything you have has been given to you by God for the glory of God.

You cannot now leverage it to put God in your debt. Whenever you feel that welling up in you, that you deserve better... You think you've kind of made God owe you, but God doesn't owe you anything, which makes everything good in your life a cause to worship. He doesn't owe you anything. He doesn't owe you the breath in your lungs. He's generously giving that to you even now in this moment.

The apostle Paul reminds them, "Remember who you are. You are not one who knows enough to scrutinize. You are not one who knows enough to shake your fist at the heaven, and you will never, not with your behavior or your good gifts or whatever, put God in your debt." Then he ends this doxology with really the point of the Bible. Verse 36 says, "**For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.**"

What I mean when I say that that is really the story of the Bible is what we see in the Bible is that everything...you, me, everything...is for him, to him, from him, about him, for his glory alone. Amen and amen. That's the story of the Bible: God redeeming a fallen creation, putting back together what's broken, restoring, reconciling, healing, bringing back together what sin fractured, for the glory of his name by the power of Jesus Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit. That's what the Bible is about.

Martin Luther King Jr., as the civil rights action started to really heat up and people actually started to get seriously beaten, if not killed, and there were a lot of threats going around, wrote a sermon that turned into a paper that turned into a book called *Our God is Able*. Here's a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. as things began to heat up.

"It seemed as though I heard an inner voice saying, 'Stand up for righteousness. Stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.' Almost at once my fears began to pass from me. The outer situation remained..." I love that line. "The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm. Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly."

Let's just stop for a second and talk about how that's an act of the Holy Spirit. Nobody gets that phone call, "Hey, your house was bombed," and goes, "Okay. Is everybody all right? Okay, everybody is all right? Praise God," without something supernatural happening. Here's what he ties it to. I think the last two sentences are so important.

"My experience with God had given me new strength and trust." He had this experience with God in the Scriptures, in prayer, that had now bolstered his strength and trust in God. Then he ends it with, "I know now that God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms of life." Not make the storms of life go away but give us the inner strength and courage to deal with the storms of life.

For literally about eight minutes, I want to take it down on the ground and go, "Okay, what does Christian courage look like day in and day out?" Three things. If you're long here, you're like, "Oh my gosh. Three things from you? That's another two hours." I promise you it's not. It's going to be very quick. Three things that would mark us as having Christian courage.

The first would be *integrity*. We have been shaped by the God of the Bible in our hearts in such a way that we walk in uprightness. There's a woman in our church here at this campus, Flower

Mound Campus, who was climbing the ladder in her industry and doing very well. Very smart, very educated woman.

Then she ran into a manager who was doing some things that were shady at best and illegal at worst. She knew that to do those things, going against her conscience, would then make her a part of what was displeasing to the Lord. Here's the real key in it. What she was making was going to be key for them to make it as a family. I don't mean make it like long vacations in the summer. I mean pay their bills, have cable television, eat food.

So trusting the Lord, knowing that coworkers were watching and seeing how she would play this, she reported the illegal activity, resigned from her position, and walked away. Now I wish the story went like *this* so I could encourage you, that the next day she opened up her mailbox and there was 80 grand in cash in her mailbox. That's not what happened.

Now without a job in an economy that's not booming, she kept trying to find one, kept trying to find one, kept trying to find one. Cable TV had to go, and date nights out with the husband had to go. Her husband is a hard worker but doesn't make in the range that she made. Vacations are canceled. Life shrinks in, and they're still not out of it. Yet the testimony of "There's something bigger than this" has been embraced and walked in.

Christian courage on the ground looks like integrity. It means we don't deal in shady ways with people. It means we work hard at our work. It means we are the best whatever we are. We work hard. We work late. We let people know we're working for something that's bigger than us and it's bigger than that paycheck. We are not what we do. We belong to the Lord, and belonging to the Lord, that compels us to be the best worker possible in our field. It looks like integrity.

It also looks like *devotion*. It's my hope that you will never buy the lie that there are professionals and unprofessionals when it comes to mission and ministry. God has uniquely wired you and uniquely placed you in places of influence for the glory of his name. The big missional call of God on your life and on my life is not that we would bring people to hear professional ministers but that we would be salt and light in the world where we live, which leads me to the third thing.

Devotion is I refuse to believe that the work of ministry belongs to an elect paid few. I'm going to be devoted to the kingdom of God. Church isn't going to be compartmentalized, but I'm going to be

devoted to the things of God in my life, with my time, my energy, my money, my service, mind space, heart space. I'm going to create space to be fully devoted to Jesus Christ.

Lastly, it looks like *evangelism*. Christian courage looks like evangelism. This is somewhat disturbing to me. Part of the reason I wanted to do this series is all the data we're getting is that people are more open to spiritual conversations than they have ever been. For all the "Oh my gosh, we're going to get burned at the stake and thrown in prison," really what's happening is people, partly because the Enlightenment's cracks are beginning to show... We're beginning to realize we're more than just brains on a stick and there probably *are* supernatural realities.

How do you explain the dumb shows that are on television? *Ghost Hunters*. That's like snipe hunting. You can go ahead and hunt those. They don't exist. You can just kind of keep following them around. Maybe demons, maybe angels. We're kind of caught up in the supernatural. People are willing to have these conversations. It has been Christians unwilling to start them that has been the issue.

More than likely, your neighbors are not hostile. Your coworkers are not hostile toward the gospel. In fact, they might be very open to them. But if you think they're going to recognize some sort of moral purity in you and bring it up, you're probably wrong. "You know, I was noticing when you stubbed your knee there you said, 'By golly' instead of the other word. Tell me what's driving that." That's so absurd. That's not going to happen.

Maybe you're going, "Okay, I hear you, Pastor, but, gosh, I don't read like pastors read. I don't know the answers." We're going to talk about evangelism more in a couple of weeks, but let me just lay this before you. If you're here and you feel like you've lived a life that's too hypocritical for you to share the gospel with others or you feel as though you've known them too long and you've never brought it up so to bring it up now would be odd... Here's the best way I know, if that's you, to step into this space of evangelism as an act of Christian courage. It's simply to say, "Hey, man, I need to apologize to you."

"What?"

"Yeah, will you forgive me?"

"For what?"

"Okay, we'll take the hypocrisy one first. I think I have lived in such a way as to make you really doubt or question the goodness and beauty of the God I say I love. I've been inconsistent and a fool, and I have probably created some space in your mind that you're just not confident that the God I believe in could help save and deliver you from sin. So will you forgive me for that?"

But won't you let my hypocrisy at least be a space in which we can have the conversation that my God is so generous that in my hypocrisy he's patient, longsuffering, and loving toward me in Christ Jesus? Can I tell you about Christ that makes my God be so longsuffering with me? Would you not think that a God would look at my inconsistency and light me up? Yet he does not. He loves me and cares for me and forgives me."

Or, "Hey, man, will you forgive me?"

"For what?"

"I've known you for years, and maybe it has been my own lack of courage or maybe I didn't want to ruin this friendship, but honestly, I'd love to tell you about my relationship with Jesus and what God has done in my life." Then you just get into your story and where God found you and how he has grown you and where you currently struggle. Never be prettier than you are.

"Here's where I still wrestle with doubt." Then you just start having these conversations over dinner and over cups of coffee or sitting on the back porch. We begin to do life with one another, but we're salt and light as we go. Maybe right now you're going, "Okay, but then what? What if they ask a hard question?" I've got you. You say, "I don't know." If you're like, "And?" No, no, no. That was really it. That's what I have for you. "I don't know."

God alone has salvation. God does not ask you to save anyone. Most of us did not have all of our questions answered when God saved us. I've always kind of smiled at how God is going, "That's cute. Let me save your heart, and then you'll start asking this question differently." We tell. We love. We open our homes. We walk with others over a long period of time, and we let the Lord work. Christian courage looks like integrity, it looks like devotion, and it looks like evangelism. Let's pray.

Father, will you strengthen us? Make us courageous. We're not all the way to the fringe yet. We are not disdained or despised by the masses, and yet there is a lot of misconceptions about who we are

and what we believe and what we value and what we think. Labels like *bigot*, labels like *hate speech* get attached to us quite a bit, and yet we love you and we love all that you have created.

God, you've called us to be gracious and merciful to all those around us, to be hospitable, to open our homes and our lives to those who would disagree fully with us. I pray that you'd grant us the courage to do that. I pray that you'd give us the grace to walk in boldness in the places you've put us...in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, in our places where we play in hobby. God, that we might be a bright salt and bright light to this part of Dallas in a way that we'd be marked as those who love you.

I pray where we're nervous about being odd or being considered something weird, I pray that we would just surrender to the fact that we *are*, as believers in you, odd and weird and we'd let go the high-school desire to be homecoming king and instead give our lives to something that matters eternally. Help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.