



## Marked (Part 1) – Marked by God

Matt Chandler – August 13, 2017

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Good morning. It's good to see you. For all of our campuses, welcome back. We've been off this summer, and everybody has been doing their own things, so this is the weekend when we're all back online. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Matthew 5.

As you're turning there, I don't think I need to say this, but I am going to say it. It would be an official position of The Village Church, its pastors, its elders, its leadership, and those involved that white supremacy and the alt-right is incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's evil and from the pit of hell.

That's not a political statement. You simply cannot call Jesus King and believe that nonsense. A friend of mine said heaven will be a white supremacist's hell. They're going to show up and be like, "Dang. The nations are here." I want to go on record saying this is so despicable, disgusting, and evil that it needs to be called out for what it is: bigotry, hatred, and racism, and you cannot attach the name of Jesus Christ to it.

In fact, even doing so reveals just how ignorant and foolish you are. Jesus would look far more brown than white. You wouldn't even want to hang out with Jesus, white supremacists. I don't think I'm politicizing anything. I think I am clearly calling this what it is: despicable and deplorable. In no way can you tie this to biblical Christianity.

With that said, I said this a couple of months ago, and I'll say it again. I think what we're experiencing is deeply demonic. I know we would like to say, "No, no. It's *this*, or it's *this*..." I'm just saying there's something underneath all of this that new laws aren't going to solve. It's not that we shouldn't be involved in that domain. We need to be very involved in that domain, but it's not law alone, technology alone, or education alone.

In fact, all we have seen in the last 48 hours is you can educate, but you cannot transform a heart. Without a heart transformed, you'll get the same behaviors you've ever gotten. It's why, without the gospel of Jesus Christ, you are never progressing. You are always regressing.

It is only in the transformation of the human heart that the walls of hostility are broken down and a new people is formed who are marked not by ethnicity, socioeconomics, intellect, schooling, or any of those things, but rather by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who has created a new people where there once was not one.

I want you to join me in praying that, by the grace of God, in the ugliness that has been explicitly exposed, we might finally see more clearly, repent more fully, and see the gospel do its work. I'm going to pray along those lines. I would have you join me in that, and then we'll dive into our text and our first sermon in our fall series.

Father, we ask for your help. I pray we'd all confess we are sickened and disturbed. We ask, Spirit of God, you would do the miraculous, that you would step into broken, terrible, wrung-out spaces and begin to heal and put back together. I want to pray specifically for those who were injured yesterday and for those who are courageously calling this what it is this morning in churches across the United States.

I pray we would not shrink back in fear but we would boldly call this what it is, and maybe in calling it what it is, the light shining on it would help us see more clearly. I pray you would do a profound and beautiful work in your church in the United States of America. Make it more and more diverse and multi-ethnic, and make it a place where we could see there is one King and one New Man brought about by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I pray for the utter annihilation and destruction of racism, bigotry, and nationalism that would have us suppressing, distorting, and destroying those made in the image of God. We ask you to do these things, because you and you alone can accomplish them. We, your servants, lay our lives at your feet and ask you'd tell us what to do and where to go. For now, we are praying and hopeful. It's in your beautiful name I pray, amen.

As I watched a Nazi flag being swung around yesterday on the news, what struck me was the great cost our country paid to put that flag down and that it is actually illegal to own and wave that flag in Germany. Let me dive in before I preach this.

In 2011, The Village Church was a mess. Here's what I mean. It was the kind of mess I think a lot of pastors dream for. I am not one of those who dreamed for the mess we were in. Since '03, we had grown by over 1,000 per year, and cracks were starting to show. We were not built out well enough to handle that kind of influx. In fact, I don't know how you prepare for that kind of influx of humanity.

God was doing spectacular things, but we were all over the place. We were having close to 200 events annually, which was wearing out our staff. People were starting to fall through cracks. We pulled our executive staff out in 2011, and we said, "We want to submit to the Lord. We're going to spend some time praying, thinking, arguing with one another, and simplifying things so we can minister to the people God has brought to us in a way that's effective, open, and transparent."

We set out to do this, and it was much harder than we thought. At that point, we had a vision statement, a mission statement, statements for each ministry, statements for how those ministries interacted with each other, and statements for how this campus interacted with other campuses... There were about 40 statements. You could get lost in it.

We said, "No, no. We want one statement by which we will govern what we're going to do, what we're not going to do, and what we want to be about as The Village Church." We went about that in two ways. First, we looked to the Bible. "What is the mission and vision of the church of Jesus Christ?" We tried to answer that question. We went to work.

We took that theology, and we wanted to put it on the ground. The way we put it on the ground was like this: When Audrey is 35 years old, if I were to look at her life, what is the fruit of someone who is seriously pursuing Jesus Christ? We wrangled over the Bible and then we wrangled over what we wanted the Spirit of God to have accomplished in our children.

Then we came up with this statement that is on the wall at every one of our campuses: "We [The Village Church] exist to bring glory to God..." That's why we're here. "...by making disciples..." That's what the church is about. We've been called to disciple-making, learning, and following Jesus Christ. That's why we exist. There is nothing else we are to be doing besides bringing glory to God by making disciples.

Then we wanted to add to that how we were going to go about doing that. We added this: "...through gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, gospel-centered service and gospel-centered multiplication." Maybe you're an English teacher, and you're like, "That's really redundant. I don't know if you know this, Chandler, but I've heard you speak, and I've seen some English weakness in you. What you might be able to do there is just say *gospel-centered* once. Then it's shorter, and you don't have to take up the whole wall out there."

We actually did that on purpose, because we thought the redundancy would teach in a way that saying it once wouldn't. We wanted to say, "The kind of worship we're after is the kind of worship that's rooted and established by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The kind of community we're after is not just a group of people with some shared interests who are doing life together about two inches deep, discussing the Cowboys, kids, and the construction on Chinn Chapel."

We wanted those who had literally dived into the depths of life together, who are informed, sustained, and empowered by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We wanted those who were willing to serve not out of guilt or the idea, "Man, I need to earn something." We wanted those who would serve others just because they had been so faithfully served in the gospel. We wanted us to be a place that multiplies because we have been shaped by the fact that we are here because others were courageous to multiply themselves.

This fall, in this *Marked* series, we're going to revisit that statement over the next few weeks, although we're going to look at it from a different perspective. Then, after that, we're going to get into our church's distinctives. We'll spend six weeks on this statement, and from that point until Advent, we're going to dive into our distinctives.

Our distinctives would be in the open hand of theology, which means you don't have to agree with us to be a Christian, but they are near and dear to our hearts, so it's probably important you know we believe that and land there. We'll cover Reformed soteriology, continuism, inerrancy, complementarianism, and all of that. It should be a really excited part of the fall. We're eager for it.

Before we get there, though, I want us to get some lenses on I think we're going to need if we're going to understand what we're talking about over the course of the next six weeks. Let's look at Matthew 5. Matthew 5 is going to introduce us to some concepts I think we're desperate for this fall. Let's look at Matthew 5:13-16.

**"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You 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, 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."**

We're hearing, seeing, and reading that through a specific lens. It's the lens of the day in which we live. The way I would argue here is when Jesus actually said that in the first century to a predominantly agrarian society, they would have heard it a way that we may not hear it. Let me try to expose what I believe is the weakness of our day.

You and I are living, breathing, and operating in a culture that values achievement above and beyond anything else. What you and I, via every inlet we have, are being taught and are hearing is we must achieve to be of any real value. You see this everywhere. We value steps and process more than we value time and patience. We want mechanical steps, not organic growth.

We're like, "Just tell me what to do. This is broken. Give me the four things I'm supposed to do to make this not be broken," as if life ever obeyed that desire. We want *doing*, and we don't trust *being*. We are warped by shame and are told on every front we are not enough. I think you think I hate social media. I don't hate it; I just strongly despise it. Social media does nothing but reinforce this. In fact, even our play has turned into performance rather than pleasure.

Brené Brown is a researcher at the University of Houston. She gave the number one TED Talk to ever be filmed. It was on vulnerability, shame, and all that. She says men and women experience the pressure of achievement in very different ways. Here's how she says women experience an achievement-based culture:

"[Women are] expected (and sometimes desire) to be perfect, yet we're not allowed to look as if we're working for it. We want it to just materialize somehow. Everything should be effortless. The expectation is to be natural beauties, natural mothers, natural leaders, and naturally good parents, and we want to belong to naturally fabulous families." Brené goes on to argue in an achievement culture with perfection as the standard, a woman is forced into impossible either-ors. Here's her list.

"Be perfect, but don't make a fuss about it, and don't take time away from anything, like your family or your partner or your work, to achieve your perfection. If you're really good, perfection should be easy.

Don't upset anyone or hurt anyone's feelings, but say what's on your mind.

Dial the sexuality way up (after the kids are down, the dog is walked, and the house is clean), but dial it way down at the PTA meeting. And, geez, whatever you do, don't confuse the two.

Just be yourself, but not if it means being shy or unsure.

Don't make people feel uncomfortable, but be honest.

Don't get too emotional, but don't be too detached either. Too emotional and you're hysterical. Too detached and you're a cold hearted [witch]."

She uses different language, but she's a researcher, and I'm a pastor, so I edited that quote. This is what Brené Brown says women feel in an achievement-based culture. "You have to do... You have to be..." They feel the weight of perfection, that they have to be perfect. Not only do they have to be perfect, but in that perfection it has to look like they're not working at it. Ladies, does anybody feel any of this?

This is my bag on social media. When you get into bed at night and roll onto your side, and your husband is checking his ESPN or whatever, and you're scrolling through... "What is that? Supermom there. Superwife there. Superfamily there. Oh my gosh, look what they had for dinner. We had ramen noodles and hamburger meat. That mother worked all day. She made that salad from stuff she grew in her backyard. Oh my gosh. I've fallen short."

Think about what this does. If you have to be perfect, can you say "no," or do you have to say "yes" to every opportunity? If other mothers are doing it, you should be able to do it. This is the siren song of perfection. It's soul-crushing.

Men, according to Brené Brown and her research, experience it differently. Here's how men experience an achievement culture. "Basically, men live under the pressure of one unrelenting message: Do not be perceived as weak." Don't fail. Don't fail at work, don't fail in marriage, don't fail

in bed, don't fail with you money, don't fail with your children... It doesn't matter. Don't fail. Don't be wrong. Don't be soft. Don't reveal any weakness or fear. Don't get criticized or ridiculed. So in an achievement culture the woman says, "I have to be perfect," and the man goes, "I can't be weak or ever fail."

Let's chat. Let's clear the deck, here. Women, you're not perfect. You can't be, you'll never be, and even as you try to be, it'll be exhausting, empty, and hollow. It'll crush any vitality and happiness you might ever have. Men, you are weak. I don't care how much creatine you're ingesting. Even our social media stuff will get to us. You can be scrolling through and be like, "That dude has six-pack abs, and I have a dad bod. I need to get back to the gym."

We get fixated, and then we begin to project the achievement status culture says we should have. Women are exhausted and worn out, and they always feel like they lack and they're not enough for their husbands, their children, their families, the church... This is the lens that has been placed over our eyes, so when we read a text like this we come to the Bible with these lenses. Let's look at Matthew 5:13-16 again.

**"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You 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, 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."**

Because of the day in which we live, we're far more apt to read that text and miss some really beautiful things for the places we don't measure up. We see in this text God says some very specific, very beautiful things about us now, but our eyes and heart are drawn to, "Oh my gosh. I'm not as salty as I should be. I have hidden my light under a bush, oh yeah."

"What am I supposed to do? Okay, Chandler. Give me the seven steps to the salty life. Give me that mechanical process. What am I supposed to add? What am I supposed to take away? How am I supposed to do this? Give me that checklist so I might step into that checklist and be salt and be light."

I want to argue the only way to look at and take very seriously where we fall short is to see what God actually says in the text is true about us. Only when we see that can we look at the very serious reality that we have fallen short of the glory of God. I'm not trying to say falling short of the glory of God doesn't matter. It matters a whole bunch.

You need only to look to the cross of Jesus Christ and the reality of hell to see how serious God is about sin and falling short of the glory of God. I'm saying the path to the fullness of life is found not in realizing you have fallen short alone but rather in how God sees you and how God has asked us to see one another.

The reason I'm saying that is the *you* in this text, that *you* are the salt and the light, is emphatic and restrictive. Here's what that means. When Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world," he's not talking to everyone. He's talking about his followers, not just individually but as a group.

The emphatic, restrictive *you* says, "If we're going to understand this text, we have to understand our relationship with God and how that works itself out in our relationships with one another." Only when we see that rightly can we address this falling short of the glory of God in a way that brings life instead of guilt, shame, and surrendering to the gods of our age, the gods of perfectionism and strength.

With that said, let's look at relationship with God. One of the unique things about how God sees us, and I think we see this most often through Scripture by how God names people and gives people new names they have no business having. God tends to name people what they'll be long before they actually are. Let me give you two examples.

In the book of Genesis, God comes to a man named Abram and a woman named Sarai, and he says, "You're going to be the father of many nations." To that, Abraham, who was 75 years old, said, "I don't have any children. I'm 75. My wife is in her 70s. I don't think this is happening." God repeats himself: "No, no. Your new name is *Abraham*, which means father of many nations. Sarai's new name is Sarah. Abraham and Sarah, this is who you are. You are the father and mother of many nations."

It's not going to read like this, but Abraham is like, "Hey, are you doing that thing where you're calling a tall person 'shorty,' or you're calling a big boy 'tiny'? Are you doing that thing right now?"

We don't have any kids, so I don't know how I'm going to be the father of many nations." God calls them and changes their names. They don't have any kids, but he says, "Your lineage will fill the earth with the glory of God."

Fifteen years later, a messenger comes again. "Father of many nations, where is mother of many nations?" "About that, she's in the tent giggling, and it's that crazy laugh that freaks me out. I'm not going in there, so you need to whisper right now, because that laugh doesn't mean she thinks this is funny. It's like that crazy, evil laugh, so you need to quit calling her *mother of many nations*."

They're 90 years old, and the names still remain. "You will be the father and mother of many nations." Lastly, 10 years after that, Abraham, father of many nations, is 100 years old when his son is conceived and born. It was 25 years from the time God said, "You are the father and mother of many nations," until those names were fulfilled. Now 25 years feels really nebulous, so let me put it on the ground. Twenty-five years ago, it was 1992. Can you remember what you were doing in 1992? Let me lay out some facts about 1992 quickly.

Chances are, depending on how you grew up, you were listening to "Achy Breaky Heart" by Billy Ray Cyrus. If you're feeling a little shame and regret about that... I'm just going to give that to you. I'm not going to try to ease that in any way. Maybe that's not your thing. Maybe you were listening to "Real Love" by Mary J Blige. "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang" was all over the place. "I Cross My Heart" by George Strait and "Jump" by Kris Kross... All of those were huge hits in 1992.

The Washington Redskins won the Super Bowl over the Buffalo Bills in 1992. I know Dallas Cowboys fans are like, "No, that was our year." No, your year was 1992-93. You won it in '93. You beat the Bills again. The Bills had been a three-year whipping post for anyone who played them in the Super Bowl. You guys got them the next year, but this year belonged to the Redskins.

The best picture was *Silence of the Lambs*. Your pastor was a senior in high school, and your pastor's wife was 12. I don't know why y'all laugh at that. Those are just the facts. There wasn't anything illegal. We didn't know each other then. You were, more than likely, wearing Doc Martens. If you were a woman or a teenager at that time, you were wearing mom jeans, because *90210* dictated you were wearing mom jeans.

Regardless of class, ethnicity, or background, chances are you had a pair of overalls in the closet. You're like, "My people don't wear overalls." I'll tell you this. Google images of Tupac and TLC. It

wasn't just white folk wearing those overalls. It was spread out all over the place. We were all in grievous error.

What were you doing in 1992? Abraham waited 25 years for his namesake to be revealed. This isn't the only place we see this in the Scriptures. In fact, one of my favorites, and the one that gives me the most hope, is Jesus renaming Simon Peter. Let's read about that in Matthew 16. Starting in verse 13, we read this.

**"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'**

**Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter [little stone, or rock], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'**

If you know the New Testament, this is a silly name for Peter. Peter is unstable, impulsive, and insecure. He reeks of those things. It's not like he has a moment here and there. He is consistently unstable, insecure, and impulsive in all the worst ways. In fact, as proof or evidence of this, what we just read there, **"...on this rock I will build my church..."** is verse 18 of Matthew 16, but if we went a few verses down from there, starting in 21:

**"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'"**

This is one example of where I had to narrow it down for this sermon. In Mark 1, despite the fact that Peter's mother-in-law is deathly ill and bedridden, he brings Jesus and all the disciples home. I'm trying to put this into my context. I'm trying to imagine what I'm going to say to my wife. I'm picking up my cell. I don't want to text this; this isn't a text conversation. I just call.

"Hey, I'm bringing over some of the guys from staff. There's going to be about 15 or 16 of us. I know your mom is deathly ill in the back room, but I think if we stay in the playroom, there shouldn't be any problem. Yeah, yeah. I know. Yes, even Judas. I know you have a feeling about that, but I've been around him. He's a good dude. Trust me on this."

He brings them to the house while the mother-in-law is deathly ill and sick. In Matthew 14, he ran out onto the water and nearly drowned. In John 18, he impulsively tried to kill the servant of the high priest. All four gospels record his betrayal and denial of Jesus Christ.

Even after the Spirit lands on him at Pentecost, he preaches a couple of sermons that lead to thousands and thousands of believers, and he's a part of the first Gentile becoming a Christian, we see in the book of Galatians he is rebuked by Paul for being an overt racist and refusing to eat with the Gentiles once these powerful Jews from Jerusalem showed up where he was.

To this man Jesus says, "I'm going to name you *Rock*," but he's more like a marshmallow. There's nothing rock-ish about him. He continually makes mistakes. He's continually insecure. He won't stop talking to prove his value and worth. I love that God calls this insecure, unstable, impulsive man *the Rock*.

If we had time, we could look at 1 and 2 Peter and see all the Spirit of God accomplished over an extended period of time in Peter's life, but he's first called *Rock* right before he makes one of the bigger mistakes of his life, and he makes an even bigger one. You would think being called *Satan* by Jesus would be the low point, but it wasn't. You'd think Jesus calling you *Satan* would be bottoming out, but it wasn't.

He took it a little bit farther and, with curses coming out of his mouth, denied he ever even knew Jesus publicly in front of everyone. According to one of the gospels, Jesus was in eyesight. Being called *Satan* by Jesus wasn't even rock bottom for this dude. He had more, and it was before any of that happened that Jesus says, "Your new name is *Peter, the Rock*."

What's going on here? God sees in us what we cannot see in ourselves. This is true because he is not limited by our weakness and our imperfections. We see in Abraham and Sarah desire and desperation, but there's a God who is able. What could Abraham and Sarah do to fulfill what God said they were? Nothing.

They had been trying. It wasn't like they got an anatomy lesson from God. That's not what happened. It's not that they had not been trying to have children. They were desperate and dependent, and God was able. It was God who grew them into their names. It was not their effort, their pushing, or their discipline. It was God who was able. That's the point of next week's entire sermon: it's the weight of the glory of God that bends everything to its will.

We see in Peter a stubborn, insecure, unstable man, but we also see the patience of God in his failure and foolishness. This God who said to Abram, "Your new name is *Father of many nations*," who said to Peter, "You're *the Rock*," is the same God who, in Matthew 5, said, "You are the salt and the light of the world."

We're going to get to how we fall short of that, so if you have some self-hate working, we'll get there. Here we go. What we see here is God is up to something. God is working in and through us to preserve, to flavor, to be an enemy of decay, and to use our lives as beacons of hope. Our lives will show out the penetrating power of the gospel as the people transformed by the gospel ourselves.

It's not just this understanding of our relationship with God that matters, because the *you* in "you are the salt and the light" is emphatic and restrictive. It's the people of God, but it is the people *of* God. That means one of the primary ways God shapes us into more of who we already are is via the grace of the people of God.

He's saying, "You are salt. You are light. That's true about you now, but you're going to grow in your saltiness and your brightness. It's going to take place over a period of time, and it's going to take place immersed in a community of saints who understand most fully what we just learned above: namely that we're all fallen, broken people in need of grace, a Savior, and a safe place to be vulnerable and honest about where we actually are."

It's an understanding of the gospel that enlightens us and should shatter the notion that we have to be perfect or we can't be weak. The gospel says, "You're imperfect, and you're hopelessly weak." That's the message of the gospel. It's a contrary message to the one we're getting from our culture. In an understanding of this, real community can form, and that community should be a safe place.

Here's what I mean by *safe place*. I want to let you know, I'm going to let you down. I'm not going to be enough. My cards are all on the table. I will disappoint you. Maybe I've already done it in this

week's message. I am human and in need of God's grace. I know you are human and in need of God's grace.

I have been a recipient of that grace from God through Jesus Christ. Then, since I've experienced that grace, that should embolden and empower my ability to be gracious to those who have also fallen short, like I have. This creates an environment where I don't have to pretend to be more than I am.

Culture would have me projecting an image that's put together, never afraid, strong and not weak, not anxious about making decisions... That's the image I'm supposed to portray, but that's not what I'm feeling in my heart, so if nobody knows that, how alone do I feel? I'm going to feel alone if I have to project an image of, "I don't have any doubts. I never struggle. In fact, Christ himself woke me up this morning. It was supernatural and crazy. I woke up, and there he is, stroking me head. He was like, 'Come, son. It's time to preach my Word.'"

That's not how I woke up this morning. I woke up, and we were out of coffee beans. I nearly had a panic attack. These are things we need to understand and know about one another. I want to extend grace to you, because I've been the recipient of God's grace. I need to have people with whom I'm doing deep, consistent life, who know what those struggles and fears are.

I don't think it's wise for everyone to know that. I certainly don't think it's wise for people who can't handle that to know that. I think, over a period of time, as we're building relationships with others, we have to have those places that are safe where we can be vulnerable and where we walk in deep, consistent community.

Let me press here. When all you do at churches is sit in the crowd and listen to preaching, you have given in to the spirit of our age, which would have you hiding and seeking information rather than belonging and being shaped and formed by others. I'm not saying this is easy. The Bible says, "**As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.**"

I don't know if you've seen this process, but it's violent. There are sparks. There's a hammer involved. I'm not trying to be overly romantic about this, but to embed yourself in community with others is how God most consistently makes us more of what he has already said we are. Think about how organic, natural, deep relationships begin to shape almost everything about your life.

The one I can go to most easily is my relationship with Lauren. I am absorbing things from her all the time. If you came into my office and I asked you what I ask anybody who comes into my office: "Can I get you a coffee or a water?" and you said, "Yeah, I'd love a coffee," and you grabbed that coffee and tried to set it down on my desk without a coaster, I would instinctively grab a coaster and set that under there.

I'm the son of a truck driver. I didn't even know what a coaster was until I got married, and now you can't even come into my office and set that thing down. You might ruin that table. I didn't know anything. I absorbed that from my wife. It wasn't even something she told me. She didn't say, "You'd better put a coaster down..." That's not what happened. I just picked up, "That must be important. Let me start doing that." You absorb from others organically when in their presence.

We heard a guy preach this past week. I was at Kanakuk Family Kamp, and on one of the nights, one of the guys who worked for Kanakuk and spends a ton of time with Joe White preached. I could tell he had been around Joe by his inflections, how he landed the plane, and his illustrations. I was like, "Oh my gosh." He even has his tonal variations. That's not bad. He's just been in his presence, and he's absorbed it.

When we walk with one another in deep community, we rub off on one another in ways that are helpful, necessary, and needed. It's a safe place to not pretend and project so we don't feel all alone. The more you project, the lonelier you will feel. The more you project perfection or that you are not weak, the angrier, more anxious, and depressed you will become. On and on and on I could go. These things are epidemic in our day in a way they were not 50 years ago.

It's an achievement-based culture that tells you, men, "Don't ever be weak, and don't you ever fail." It tells women, "You'd better be perfect, but don't act like you're working for it." If we put this on the ground, how are we supposed to look at our failings in light of this relationship with God and with one another? Let's look at it. Look back at verse 1.

**"...but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."** Sodium chloride, salt, is an extremely powerful, strong compound. Ultimately, scientifically speaking, you cannot make salt lose its saltiness. The only way for salt to lose its saltiness is to be so diluted with a liquid that the liquid overpowers the saltiness so you no longer taste what is salty.

If I grabbed your cup of coffee this morning, and I put a teaspoon of salt in it, it would be extremely salty. If I took that and put it into a one-gallon jug of water, it would still be pretty salty, but not nearly as salty as it was in your cup of coffee. If I took that teaspoon, dumped it into Lake Lewisville, and stirred it up, it would still be toxic, but it would no longer be salty. The volume of water in Lake Lewisville would trump the teaspoon of salt.

It's not that that salt lost its saltiness. It had been so absorbed by something so much larger than it you could no longer tell it was there. What he's saying in the text is, "Don't be so absorbed in the day and age in which you live as to not be distinct." You're like, "Okay, how do I do that?" It doesn't work that way. I could give you a list, but you're not going to obey it, because it's about being, not about doing.

This is how this works in this grid. Here's what God says about you. Let's put this into place. **"You are the salt of the earth..."** God is moving in you and through you to act as a preservative, to be an enemy of decay. You are not as salty now as you will be 10 years from now. God is at work in your life.

Let's stop before we move to the community piece. That means, right now, I get to rest in the gospel. I'm reading Matthew 5, and I'm not going, "Oh, my gosh. Look at how weak I am. Look how I haven't measured up. I'm not measuring up as a husband. I'm not measuring up as a father." You don't read this as a woman and go, "I knew it. I'm imperfect. I'm never going to be enough. I'm never good enough. Oh my gosh."

You don't get to do any of that. You just go, "Do you know what? The God of the universe just said, 'You are salt,' so now what I experience is grace without shame. That's my first experience if God has named me and will make me what he named me. I'm already salt. I can't see I'm salt, because I want to be saltier than I am. God's promise is, 'You're salt right now, whether you see it or not, and I'm going to make you more so.'"

If you've been following Jesus for any amount of time, how true does that ring? I'm not where I want to be, but I am a billion light years from where I was. I haven't had the day yet when I haven't wanted more, and if God is inexhaustible, 20 years from now, I'll still be wanting more. There isn't a day on this broken, spinning ball that I will not desire to be more than I already am. The key is to rest in who God has called me.

You get to experience grace if you can stop and go, "No, no. God has named me. I am the salt. When I experience that grace, it's not fear of failure or pursuit of perfection, but a surrender to God's naming of me and his work in my life. He is making me more of what I already am. I'm not paralyzed. I don't have to give in to a flight.

"I don't want to be known by anybody. I just want to sit in the back corner. I never want to go to group, because what happens if people find out I'm not perfect? What happens if I get into a Home Group, or I get really involved here, and they find out I have an anger problem? What if I get involved here and they find out I am an anxious train wreck?

What if they find out I'm prone to melancholy? What if they find out we're crazy in debt? What if they find out I sometimes sneak my kid's Adderall just to calm down my spirit? What if they find out I'm actually a high-performing drunk? What if they find out we're so drowning in debt that I've at times thought about taking my own life? What if they find out about...?"

This is what happens. That fear starts to dictate and drive a life of loneliness and despair. What you've been called to is the experience of grace. You haven't fooled anyone. You certainly haven't fooled God. This is a terrible way to do your life. God, on top of that, has immersed you in a community of faith. You can choose to withdraw and project, but what God has called you to is to immerse and belong.

This is the major place where God shapes us and molds us into more of who we already are, because the community of faith now knows you. It's a place you can be vulnerable and walk in deep relationship, and they can now encourage you and speak life into you. At times, when necessary, they can rebuke you, and they will oftentimes, if not always, be prayerful about where you feel weak and where you're hoping to feel strong. They will remind you it's in the ordinary where God does beautiful things, that Christ is perfect and strong, so you don't have to be.

It's in that place that we're encouraged, built up, and stirred up. That's why God says we should make a big deal about getting together. We should make it a priority to walk deeply with those who are serious about Jesus Christ and his Word. We should not ever be satisfied with inch-deep Christian friendships. We should want more, dig deeper, be more honest, come clean, be vulnerable, and trust.

We see it again: **"A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house."** Here it is again. You are the light of the world. God is showing the gospel light through your life and mine. Let's put this into context, because he also says, "Don't put a basket over that. Don't hide. Don't be ashamed. Don't let your belief system be this background thing. Let your light shine before men. Let them know Jesus is your King, your Lord, and your Savior."

Where do we go? "Oh, my gosh. There's another thing. I have totally dimmed out my light. Nobody at work knows I'm a Christian. My neighbors don't know I'm a Christian. I've failed again. Give me a match, pastor, to relight that light." No. What I will do is put it back into this context. You are the light of the world, not as much as you will be, but you are light. By God's grace, you will burn brighter and hotter over time.

God is at work in your life. God has immersed you in a community, and they will help you with this. Over a period of time, by God's grace, encouraged by the saints, prayed for by the saints, called out by the saints, and rebuked by the saints, you will burn hotter and brighter, because God is not powerless to grow you into what he has called you, and he cannot fail.

This fall, when we look back at our mission statement, "We exist to bring glory to God by making disciples through gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, gospel-centered service and gospel-centered multiplication," we want to see this through the lens of, "This is who we are, not just what we do."

We are worshipers. We are those who have been immersed in community by the God who has saved us. You have not just been saved to him; you have been saved to us. *You* is emphatic and restrictive. We are those who serve one another. We are servants. In fact, we are addressed as servants repeatedly throughout the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament. We, by nature of belonging to God in Christ, are multipliers.

This is how God marks us. What it means to be the people of God is not built around our ethnicity, our socioeconomic status, our backgrounds, our intellect, or any of those things. We are marked by being the people God has called us and is making us by his grace. Christian, be encouraged today.

My guess is you are so hyper-fixated on where you have fallen short. Kudos. Falling short is a big deal, but I wonder if you've robbed yourself of the joy of knowing to whom you belong, who has

named you, and the power and strength of the one who has named you to grow you into that name, into more of what you already are. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. I love coming together, singing your Word, and having your Word read us. I ask we would leave this place today encouraged by the reminder that you have called us sons and daughters, that you have called us salt and light, and that you have called us worshipers.

You have called us into life with one another. You have called us servants, and you have used us as we are to multiply out the beauty of the gospel. I pray as we leave this place, the shackles of shame would be broken, and we might walk in the victory of knowing you love us and you're for us. It's from your beautiful name I pray, amen.