



Marked (Part 3) – A Healthy Disciple

Matt Chandler – August 27, 2017

Good morning! I want to take a couple of moments right off the top of our service to spend some time praying for Houston and what's going on in Houston. I already received three text messages from friends of mine in Houston, two of those being pastors describing the situation down there as catastrophic. In fact, Bruce Wesley, who planted Clear Creek Community Church and has been in that area for 30 years, says it is apocalyptic down there. In the last 24 hours, Clear Creek has received 26 inches of rain, and it has not stopped.

I want us to spend some time asking the God who was able to allow the people of Israel to walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, who was able to calm a storm, to be merciful on behalf of brothers and sisters down there. It seems to not be registering in ways that what we're seeing right now is something of historic and epic proportions in regard to the amount of rain and damage being done. Even the director of FEMA has come out and said they're going to be in Houston for years.

Maybe I'm just on the wrong feeds. It seems like everyone else is concerned with the fight last night or things of that nature. Meanwhile, one of the largest cities in the world is under water. There are stories already of people who have gone in their attics and then not been able to get out because they're in their attic and can't go back through the house.

There is a ton of horrific things going on right now down in Houston. I just want us to pray the Lord would be merciful. This storm just hit, and it's just stayed right on top of them, dumping water, with no end in sight. We want to just pray that God would intervene, that this storm would just kind of dissipate and cease to be. I'm going to pray for us. Will you join me in praying? Then we're going to dive into Matthew, chapter 13.

Father, we just ask for your mercy. We just praise you as the God who has all authority, all power, all might. Nothing can stay your hand. We ask for an intervention in this storm that seems to sit

right over a city that's filled with people who we know or love, brothers and sisters of ours who love you and worship you. We just ask for the storm to break apart.

Maybe even in this moment in an unprecedented, mind-boggling act, would you let this storm even as we pray dissipate and vanish from the atmosphere? We're asking you to do this for the glory and fame of your name, Jesus, so men and women might know you are the one true God, the King of Glory. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

If you have your Bibles, I want to ask you to go ahead and turn to Matthew, chapter 13. Just from the top, I want you to know this message has been a little bit weighty. I've wanted it to be, intended it to be, because I think we've grown in some confusion, and I want to try to confront and clarify that confusion for the good of our souls and the glory of Jesus Christ.

We're walking through our mission vision statement this fall. I'll put it back up on the screen just to show you where we are. We have covered so far, "We exist to bring glory to God..." That brings us to this week. "...by making disciples..." What I want to talk about today is discipleship and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I think there's some confusion, so let me define what it means to be a disciple and then tell you what I see to be the confusion. Then we'll dive into Matthew 13.

Let me put this on the screen. "Discipleship is the process of devoting oneself to a teacher to learn from and become more like them." For Christians (plural) in community... Discipleship can only take place in community. There is no discipleship with you off by yourself. That's not how this works. This refers to the process of learning the teachings of Jesus in the Scriptures and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship not only involves the process of becoming a disciple but of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism.

Now here's my lean. Here's my push today. There seems to be a misunderstanding and a creation of a new category in which you can believe in Jesus but not follow him. Right? What we have in 2017 evangelicalism is a lot of people are able to say, "I believe in Jesus." What they're saying is they believe in some historic facts. They believe in Jesus like you would believe in Abraham Lincoln. "I know he was a man. It seems like he did some good things. I kind of like what he has brought about."

But to believe in Jesus is not like believing in Abraham Lincoln. To believe in Jesus requires we follow Jesus, or we do not believe. To say you believe in Jesus but do not follow him empties belief

of its meaning. You cannot say, "Jesus is the only begotten Son of God who has come to take away the sins of the world and to reconcile us to the Father and to redeem and reconcile all that's gone broken in the world, but I have no intention of surrendering to or following him. I just believe he was."

Your declaration or your malintent in following him reveals you actually don't believe he is who he says he is. Your lack of following him reveals your lack of belief. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means not that we believe some things intellectually but that we've surrendered our lives over to his lordship, and we are following after him. Anything less than that is not biblical Christianity; it is something of your imagination.

In fact, the early church was actually just known as the Way. It was Acts 11 that they're first called Christians. What do they mean by *the Way*? Well, they lived the way of Jesus. That's what they did. They lived life like Jesus would have them live life. Then the question has to be, "Where would they learn how to live the way of Jesus?" Well, it was divinely imputed and divinely empowered.

Here's what I mean. To be a disciple, to be a follower of Jesus Christ who is learning the way of Jesus and following in obedience, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to have imputed to you the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not, "I used to wild out in college, and now I don't." Are you tracking with me? That's not what we believe! To be a disciple is not, "I used to sleep around and get high, and now I don't." That's not Christianity. That's not what our faith teaches and believes. That is the fruit of receiving a righteousness that is not our own.

The righteousness we have has been imputed to us via the perfection of Jesus Christ. There should be no swagger in the kingdom. We talk about this all the time. You have no boast but the cross of Christ. That's it! Literally, you have nothing to brag about, point to, celebrate, or pat yourself on the back about. All we have to boast in is what Christ has done freely for us.

This is hard for us. It's hard for me! I am an achiever by birth. I am a builder. I want to make it happen. I want to make things happen. I want to lead in such a way that makes things happen. I want to build. It's hard for me to believe what gives me access to my heavenly Father is just the free gift of God's grace extended to me, imputed to me via the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yet there is no one following Jesus, believing in Jesus, who does not lean on and live by this imputed righteousness. This isn't the only thing that's divinely given. Not only is imputed righteousness given but also the gift of illumination, the ability to see, the ability to understand what pleases God and displeases God. This is given, not earned.

Now I think the place you'll see this is if you ever kind of turn on the *Discovery Channel* or you pick up... Around Easter, every major magazine out there will do some story on Jesus and the resurrection and what to do with that. What you'll find is a lot of biblical scholars who can't see the gospel for the forest. Right? I mean, they just can't see it. They're an expert on this historical book that misses the very point of the book.

Now what is that? Well, they lack illumination. They can't see for all their seeing. The gift of illumination is a gift. You can't do anything to get that. You can cry out for it. You can want it. You can ask God for it, but you can't decide you're going to be illuminated and you're going to be righteous. Both of those are given. The disciple does not earn those. The disciple does not make their own. They're free gifts.

But then following Jesus is not just imputed, but it's also empowered. The Spirit of God fills us and empowers us to do what God has commanded us to do. Here's the great news about following Jesus, being a follower of Jesus Christ. God will never ask you to do anything he does not empower you to do. *You* do that to you. God has not done that to you. You put expectations on yourself that you cannot achieve. You do it all the time.

God does not do this to you. You are more cruel to yourself, and God is kind to you. He never asks you to do anything that he does not empower you to do. I know you're like, "Whoa! Hey, man. Do you need some rest, bro?" I don't. Man, I feel alive. I'm just anxious for you. I'm nervous for us. If there's a category of, "I can believe but not follow," eternity is at stake.

Listen. I will sleep better knowing I have said these things to you than if I will *not* say these things to you. You can tell I'm not trying to grow a megachurch here today, right? Amen? This is not the way you do that. Yet to stand cleanly before the Lord, I just have to say you cannot say you believe in Jesus and not follow him. That is something of your imagination. That is not in the Scriptures.

The Spirit does the illumination. We looked at this verse last week. I want to look at it again this week. It's one of those verses I want you to know. The Spirit does this imputed righteousness and

illumination. Then we find out the Spirit begins to empower us. Second Corinthians 3:18: "**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.**" Listen to the last line. "**For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**"

Where is the transforming power of life? Where does the energy, the force, the fuel of obedience come from? From the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Now our obedience and following Jesus is divinely empowered. It's not just *imputed* but now *empowered*. It's not that we get saved, and then we just sit on our couch and wait to become holy.

It's not like we get saved, and then that's it. No, no. We're called into something to be a part of something, to be gathered in a community for specific purposes, namely a community that's following after Jesus. Not simply believing in but following after. When the Bible says things like this...

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Do you hear it? Sin will have no dominion over you. In other parts of the New Testament, it's stated like this: "You are no longer slaves to sin." We have been set free from the dominion of sin so you have been empowered via the Holy Spirit of God to live a sinless life. I know many of you are like, "Well, that certainly hasn't been my experience." I'm glad you're asking about that. We're going to get to it.

I heard Tommy Nelson up at Denton Bible say this one time. I loved the illustration. "The phone will still ring, but you don't have to answer it." The phone will still ring, but you don't have to answer it. You have inside of you in your soul the power to say *no* and the power to say *yes*. That has been divinely given to you, empowered in your soul to hear the ring of lust and not have to answer it, to hear the ring of anger and not have to answer it, to hear the ring of greed, to hear the ring (you name it) and not have to answer it. You are not a slave to sin any longer!

Christ has imputed his righteousness. You have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. Victory is yours. You need only walk in it. When the Bible commands these things, God hasn't jammed you up. God has not set before you a calling you cannot walk in. He has actually empowered you to step into what he has commanded you to walk in. Now I love this. This is accredited to John Bunyan. This is a little poem that kind of talks about the difference between law-based living and what the gospel does. Here's what it says.

"Run, John, run," the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands.
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and gives us wings.

I love that idea that what the law did is said, "Do, do, do" but gave no power to actually do those things. Then the gospel comes in and says, "Let's fly!" and then gives us wings. What are the wings we fly on? The imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit to say *yes* to Jesus.

Then remember what we said a disciple was. A disciple is in the process of learning the teachings of Jesus in the Scripture and following after his example in obedience to the power of the Holy Spirit. My guess is many of us kind of heard the good news, grabbed onto it, and started just saying yes and following after Jesus. If we're really, really honest, a lot of times what Jesus asks of us is easy to give.

Then there are those times where, man, it's not as easy. Most of us have these little areas. We're just like, "Agh! You can have everything. Just don't touch *this*." When I became a Christian, no one told me how ruthless Jesus was going to go after *everything*. I mean, I think they did, but I thought, "Oh, surely not *everything*."

What happens is we have this relationship, this fear, or this anxiety, and we don't want to lay it down. We want to control it, manage it, and hold it on to ourselves. The Lord will say, "Give that to me," and we'll say, "No!" We'll dig in our heels and say *no*. At that point, what we know Christ has asked of us in regard to being his disciple, we have refused to surrender. At that point, our heart has been hardened, and then it becomes easier and easier and easier to answer the phone rather than to ignore it and to walk in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

So Jesus knows this will be our experience. He tells this parable in Matthew 13 to kind of help us pay attention to the dangers that can befall us as we follow him. With that said, let's dive into this text. Matthew 13. Let's read the first nine verses.

"That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.'"

Now what happens next in this parable is actually super encouraging to me. He tells this parable to the crowd and says, **"He who has ears, let him hear."** Then what happens is his disciples come up to him and go, "We don't know what you're talking about. We don't. I don't know how you're expecting *them* to understand because, man, we're with you 24/7, Boss, and *we* don't know what you're talking about."

In fact, if you use your imagination, I can just imagine Peter was like, "Hey, Jesus, really quickly, this guy just came up and asked me. He was like, 'What is he talking about?' I said, 'You need to pray about that and see what the Spirit says.' Hurry! I need to know what this means so I can go tell this guy what you want him to know."

It's just comforting to me that these brothers who have spent all this time with Jesus, just heard Jesus teach, and they're like, "Uh-oh!" He is not saying it to the crowd. Even those closest to him are like, "We don't know what you're talking about." What's comforting is, without just laying in to his disciples, Jesus then explains the parable. Look at verse 18.

"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but

endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

You have in this parable four types of soil. The first hears the Word but does not understand it. I think what's happening in this part of this text is there's this category for people who are just not spiritually open. They're not interested in spiritual conversations. They're not interested in spiritual realities. Our role in that place is to simply pray God would soften the ground, pray God would give them understanding. We don't write people off who are not spiritually open. We pray God would create a sensitivity toward spiritual realities.

Then what we see happen in the second soil is where, as followers of Jesus, I think we just need to be aware this is a possibility. In fact, I think I see it often not just in larger evangelicalism but also even in our own church. The first illustration he uses (a place where, as followers of Jesus Christ, we need to be paying attention to our life and doctrine closely) is this idea of someone who hears the Word and receives it with joy. Then the sun comes out, scorches it, and kills it.

When you first read that, you're like, "Oh, okay." But then when he explains it, here's what he says. This is a person who hears the gospel and receives it with great joy. When tribulation and persecution come, they scorch, shrivel up, and die because they have no root. The first danger as followers of Jesus Christ, as disciples, is having no real root. That gets exposed in persecution and tribulation.

Now whether we're taught it or not, there is in almost every one of us this insidious prosperity gospel belief that we have lived in such a way that we deserve the blessings of God. We would never articulate it that way, but what I've seen time and time and time again is those who, when persecution, tribulation, or difficulty befall their life, they have this long list of reasons why it shouldn't be them and that God owes them.

They're good people. They go to church. That one time they even gave! They're not as bad as other people. "God should bless me. I deserve to be blessed by God!" Again, this idea that giving our lives

to Jesus means we have put him in our debt is absurd and found nowhere in the Scriptures. If anything, Christians should never be surprised by tribulation and difficulty. The Bible is full of it!

Who gets out without bleeding, without loss, without mourning, without hurting? Who? You guys want to just walk through the Bible? Jesus? Nope. Crucified. Unless you hyper spiritualize that, that's a real physical body that's torn to pieces, that's punched, spit on, mocked, and hung up in shame, dying a death for our sins. That's legitimate physical pain. That's not spiritual pain, although you could argue there's significant spiritual pain on the cross also.

Moses? We love big Mo', right? We spent nine months walking through the book of Exodus. Moses wanders the desert for 40 years with grumbling, complaining church folk. Church folk have changed over the days, but back then, they were grumbling and complaining. Then he doesn't even get to go into the Promised Land. He dies on the mountain. He doesn't even get to grab the inheritance that was promised. In fact, you see him next on the Mount of Transfiguration seeing the glory of Christ revealed. There's his reward.

Do you want to talk Jeremiah? Jeremiah goes into exile with everyone else in Israel, despite the fact that he pled with them to repent and believe. Do you guys want to keep going? John the Baptist. Beheaded. Jesus said of that guy, "There's not a greater born among men than John the Baptist." He got his head cut off after he was imprisoned per the request of a stripper. You wouldn't think that's how the greatest man born would go out, but that's how he went out.

Oh! Y'all want to talk about Paul? Great! Because that's who was next on my list. At his conversion, it was said of him by Jesus, "**For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.**" He is repeatedly beaten, thrown into prison, has the hard work of planting churches, has false teachers come in behind him and destroy what he has built. He is beaten significantly and a couple of times left for dead. They thought he was dead and left him. They beat the skin off his back. They beat that dude with rods. I mean, he just constantly got tortured.

He was shipwrecked twice. In one of those shipwrecks, he got to shore on Malta. He goes to build a fire and gets bitten by a snake. I would have lost my mind! I mean, here you are. You're out there evangelizing the world. You're telling everybody about Jesus Christ. You're operating in great power, and at every turn, you're beaten. You're thrown in prison.

Your hard work is torn down by those who are lying. Then you get in another shipwreck, finally make it to shore exhausted. You go to try to start a fire, and you get bit by a poisonous viper. I'm just saying your pastor would be like, "Come on!" Yet here he is. He makes it to Rome and gets his head cut off.

Peter? Crucified upside down. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved? Boiled alive, tradition tells us. He didn't die. It freaked out the Romans so they exiled him to Patmos. Who else do you want to talk about? You can't name a guy or a woman... We live in a broken world. Tribulation, persecution, should never surprise us. I don't know where we're getting the idea that giving your life to Jesus Christ means a life of ease without suffering. It's certainly not our Bible.

Now although it shouldn't surprise us, what we see in the Bible is it can and it's okay for it to shake us. So you shouldn't be surprised by it, but you will get shook by it. Here's how I want to just kind of help us today. It's okay to get shook by it. Remember when we were talking about Paul? You know, shipwrecked, beaten, all that. If you think about his testimony, it's a pretty amazing testimony.

If you come and I were to say to you, "Hey, Jesus saved me," you would go, "Oh, okay. Tell me about that." I was like, "Well, this guy name Jeff Faircloth shared the gospel with me, walked with me, and then I gave my life to Christ." Well, Paul's testimony is, "Hey, do you know who saved me? Jesus did." You're like, "Yeah, great. Who was the instrument by which Jesus saved you?"

"No, you misunderstand. Jesus saved me."

"No, yeah. Yeah, me too. Yeah, yeah, me too. Jeff told me, and I was like... Then Jesus saved me."

"No, no. Yeah, Jesus saved me. I was on the road to Damascus. Jesus was like, 'What are you doing? No, you're not. You're going to follow me. Let's go.' Jesus actually saved me. The instrument of my salvation in Christ was actually Jesus."

Then when you think about his ministry, the Bible tells us the apostle Paul's handkerchief and apron healed people. People would just take his hankie and throw it on somebody, and it would heal them. He told one guy he wasn't allowed to be dead. He went to a place called the third heaven. I don't know what that is. I don't know that I've been to the first, but he had been at the third.

You're talking about a man who walked in supernatural power, who had verbally had a conversation with Jesus Christ post-resurrection. Here's what he says about the sorrows of a broken world: perplexed but not crushed. Perplexed but not crushed! Look at me. I get it. I get that on this broken planet right now, really difficult, painful, awful, evil, deplorable, despicable, horrific things can happen. I get it!

What the Bible says, what the Bible grants in our not being surprised by those things, is that it's still okay to be shook by them. I'm perplexed. I'm confused. Now what I want to invite you into is to no longer pretend that's not your reality. If you've walked in some of that... Listen. I know a lot of people who have. I know a lot of people who sprung up quickly. "I love Jesus. I'm going to follow Jesus." Then the hurts of this world began to make it difficult for them to believe God is trustworthy and good.

What happens in an achievement-based culture... We've been talking a lot about that in this series. When you feel like you have to achieve, then you can't be honest about your disappointment. You can't be honest about your wrestle with whether or not God is good. You can't be honest about this break between God being good, holy, right, and beautiful and what you've experienced.

What you do is you try to just deal with that yourself. The Devil loves to get us all alone because that's where he can destroy us, when the invitation is, "Hey, just in the assembly, I'm perplexed. This doesn't make sense. I need help. Man, I am struggling with this. I don't get it." This is the apostle Paul. This is third heaven, handkerchief-healing people, perplexed. "I'm perplexed. I don't get this! I've spoken to Jesus face-to-face post-resurrection. I'm struggling a bit here. I am perplexed."

One of the things that can rob us of following after Jesus Christ is being theologically thin. Are you tracking with me when I say that? Being theologically thin. Theology and the study of who God is and what God is like doesn't lead to cold, dead orthodoxy. Or at least it shouldn't. It should lead to an understanding of his goodness and grace that brings vibrancy and depth, purpose and meaning to the Christian life.

So to see him for who he is, to gaze upon his beauty, to know his purposes and plans as much as we can know them in this kind of millisecond we're in the creative order, is to have a type of rootedness that although we're perplexed, although we mourn, although we hurt, we can lean in

and trust. We can lean in with hope. We can, with our brothers and sisters and in community, hang on to the words of God as being true, right, and good.

But this isn't the only warning he gives us. Not only is there this category of having no root, being thin, but then he goes on and tells us the second thing that as disciples, as followers, we need to be mindful of. He talks about the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Now what's interesting to note about the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches is he describes that process not as *immediately* they fall away but rather they are choked out.

I don't know if you've ever been choked out. Let me describe the experience. Getting choked out is not like getting knocked out. Are you tracking with me? When you get knocked out, that's kind of like instantaneous (or so Josh Patterson told me). When you get choked out, it takes a little while. Being choked out is to have the air cut off from getting to your brain. It's not instantaneous. It takes a little bit.

When he talks about the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, he is not talking about what happens in tribulation and persecution where it can happen in an instant, but rather over a period of time, we can be subdued. We can be rendered spiritually unconscious without even knowing it.

What does it? Well, he says the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and they're tied to one another. Let me explain. When we talk about the cares of the world, how do the cares of the world choke out our fruitfulness as followers of Jesus Christ? Well, if I could just ask three questions around the cares of the world, here is the mantra of someone who is being choked out by the cares of the world: "How do I control this? How do I manage this? How do I manipulate this to my will?"

That's the mantra of someone being choked out by the cares of the world. "How do I control this? How do I make this be what I want it to be? How do I manage this? How do I manipulate my will into being the life?" What happens is you feel the pressure of the world and your own fears and insecurities. Rather than trusting in God and leaning in God, you leap to action. You manage, you control, and you manipulate. You become the sovereign over your world in the false pretense of being able to control the world around you.

Look at me. It's a trap. The more anxiety you feel, the more you act in controlling ways, the more anxiety you feel. Downward it spirals. What might just lift the weight of anxiety is trusting in

someone who actually has some power to do things. You can't control other people. You can't manage them. You can't manipulate them to the point where you flourish and are filled with joy, and they flourish and are filled with joy.

What you can do, trusting in the imputed righteousness of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, is lean in to the sovereign reign of our King and trust him. Follow him in obedience. Grow in his grace. Grow in his kindness. Then he ties this kind of controlling, managing, manipulating thing to the deceitfulness of wealth and riches. Now why would he tie those two together?

Because what makes us feel most safe and most in control? Is it not money? Do we not feel most in control of our own destiny when we have some cash? I know some of you are like, "I don't know. Maybe. Maybe one day." Okay. You don't have to be crazy wealthy for this to be true. There is a type of reliance and desperation that occurs when you have to really kind of trust that the Lord is going to provide that vanishes when you don't feel like you need the Lord to provide because you feel like you've provided for yourself.

Just to use my own life as an illustration, when Lauren and I got married, I was making \$12,000 a year. That was before taxes. Now to be fair, when you're making 12K, when you're being taxed, what they're taking isn't a lot. But when you're making \$12,000 a year, no matter what they took, it was a lot. Lauren and I were in this place in life where we were living in married student housing. Thank God, because we couldn't have lived anywhere else except maybe a tent somewhere.

Here we are. Every little thing had to be teased out. We were both still in school. I was not on any scholarships to speak of. Man, we were trying to pay for school. We were trying to stay alive. Twelve thousand dollars isn't a lot. We were trying to pay bills. Some of our biggest fights back in those days would be for one of us to come home and the other one to have drunk a full Coke without sharing it. "You can't do that! We have to split that, maybe twice! That's two separate things." A little shot glass of Coke. "Mmm! Sugary goodness!"

I'm telling you, there was a weight on us in those days that we needed the Lord to come through. "If I'm going to finish my degree, we need the Lord to come through. If you're going to finish your degree, we need the Lord to come through. If we're going to be able to make rent and eat something besides Ramen noodles, if we're going to insert any protein into our diet, we're going to need the Lord to come through."

Then here's what's happened over time. The way we have budgeted has not changed. The percentage we've been committed since we got married to give away has not changed. But the Lord has blessed financially. I don't make \$12,000 a year anymore. You can feel the alleviation of that pressure. Now let me tell you what I'm *not* saying.

I'm not saying wealth is a bad thing. I'm not saying you should feel ashamed or guilty if you have money and a lot of it. In fact, I would never want you to feel that. I think you've been blessed by the Lord. You just need to make sure your money doesn't own you. See, what Jesus teaches is no man can have two masters. He will serve one, and he will neglect the other. You won't be able to serve God and money.

If I could kind of change the wording of that... You don't need to email me. This isn't the inerrant Word of God. I'm saying if I can help you understand that, no one can put their trust fully in God who has their trust fully in money. You will neglect one. Your tomorrow and your security tomorrow is either in God or in your ability to save and invest enough.

I'm not one of those guys who thinks you shouldn't be saving and investing. In fact, I would say wisdom says you *should* save, and you *should* invest. Yet your future is not secure because of that nest egg. Your future is secure because you belong to the sovereign King of Glory. Are you tracking with me?

Now this chokes us out. Do you see how it could choke you out? Do you see how if you're like, "Gosh! Life is chaos..."? Here's the limitation of a sermon. All week long, you are being bombarded with fear-mongering clickbait. All week long! "The end of the world. It's never been this bad before. We're in the middle of a race war. We're in the middle of an economic meltdown. Trump is going to burn the world to the ground. War with North Korea. War with Mexico. War with the storm. Solar eclipse means *this*."

Right? It's just nuts! Fear. Fear. Fear. Fear. Fear. What does that do? "Oh my gosh! What are we going to do? Trump is going to kill us all. I knew it! What were our options? So storehouse. Forget cash. We need gold. Forget cash. We need silver! Forget cash. I want rifles, ammunition, and smoke grenades. We're going to make it." It's this, "We have to make our own future. Forget cash. We need land."

I am so off the rails right now, and yet you should never applaud that. It encourages what shouldn't be encouraged. Then what I have is I have 40 minutes to go, "No, no, no. No, no, no. No, no, no, no, no. God is on his throne. God is not panicked. God isn't anxious. The Trinity is not huddled up to figure out Trump. These things have not happened." God is on his throne. God is working his sovereign plan and calling his followers to follow him.

But you can see you give in to fear. You give into the cares of this world. You start to try to manage, control, and manipulate. How can you breathe? You're not free. You're enslaved. You're trusting in money. I love the way... "**...the deceitfulness of riches...**" He is like, "It's an illusion!" Here is my confession. I have not served you well around the deceitfulness of riches, and I'll explain why.

I was hired when I was 28 years old. Even when churches are coming to me now like, "We're looking at this kid. He is 28, no real pastoral experience. He can preach all right maybe," I would be like, "You are an idiot if you hire that kid." So maybe I'm saying to those of you who were on the search team, you were an idiot back then.

But what I did is I came in, and I didn't want... I was far more concerned... I didn't want to grow a church from transferred growth. Are you tracking with me? I didn't want Christians at other churches to go, "Oh, his church is better. Let's go over there." I didn't want that. I wanted it to be grimy. I wanted unbelievers, skeptics, and people who had never felt comfortable in church to come, hear the Word of God, and be pushed and challenged by it.

In light of that, I never wanted to give the skeptic, I never wanted to give the unbeliever, ammunition to not listen to the gospel. One of the first decisions was to say, "We're not going to pass the plate anymore. We're going to put "joy boxes" in the corner, and people can give as they leave. I don't want to give them ammunition."

Where I failed you who are sons and daughters of God is I have not given you good teaching around stewardship, around the dangers of money, and around the joy of generosity and open-handed giving. You don't need to brace yourself for a giving campaign. That's not what I'm setting us up for.

I'm saying to you I need to, in time, do better around this idea, because Jesus thinks money and how you look at it and what you do with it is a very, very, very big deal. He teaches on it more than he teaches on heaven and hell. We'll get there. No need to clutch your wallet. We're not going there today.

Now here's what I want to lay before you just as we kind of conclude our time together. No one drifts toward obedience to Jesus Christ. If you are not informed and fueled by grace, pursuing Jesus, you are being swept downstream away from him with all sorts of justifications of what's really actually going on in your life.

My favorite quote around this is from D.A. Carson. I've used it here quite a bit over the years, so here we go again. "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord." That doesn't happen. Are you tracking? Without grace-driven effort... Grace-driven means I'm not doing these things to earn love, to earn approval, to earn blessing. I am doing these things because I have approval. I have blessing. I have been forgiven.

What's motivating me is not to achieve, but I have been freely given. So out of that, I will move toward. It's very important you get that. We don't work to earn. God has freely given. That empowers our moving toward him. No one drifts toward holiness. You're not actively utilizing the spiritual disciplines to know the Word of God, to grow in deeper community, to memorize the Scriptures, to meditate on who he is, to walk with one another in Christian community. If you're not actively doing that, working a plan, you are drifting not toward obedience but away from it.

Then he goes on to talk about how we start to justify this. "We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated." Grace-driven effort.

Let me conclude like this. To simply state it again, there is no category of, "I believe in Jesus" that doesn't follow him. That cannot, does not, exist. We have created a category that does not exist in the Bible. It's not uncommon for you to meet people who say, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I believe in Jesus" with no fruit, no pursuit of him. No. It doesn't exist.

I want to simply state it. There is no belief without following. We have been called to be disciples, followers, learners who apply what we've learned in obedience. That's the call of the Christian life. Righteousness imputed. Illumination given. Divinely empowered to obey. Given some instruction

on some things to look out for. Look out for being thin spiritually, not having root. Look out for the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.

I end with this appeal. If you're in here and you have just suffered some horrific things and those things have led to you questioning the goodness of God and how to reconcile his goodness with your sorrow, I just want to say, I get it. As a minister, I have just had to sit in some heartbreaking, gut-wrenching, horrific, terrible rooms. I understand it. I want to invite you into the light with that. You don't need to feel any shame around that.

Maybe you were the victim of abuse. Maybe something really horrible happened in your marriage. Maybe a loved one got sick. I mean, there are all sorts of things we could kind of agree on today as a community are heartbreaking realities. What I want to do is ask you to step into the light, to just be able defeat darkness with light in saying, "I don't get it. I don't know how to reconcile these two. It's been hard for me to believe God is good having come from where I've come from."

Step into the light. You don't need to feel ashamed of that. You're going to find yourself among a choir of brokenness. Or maybe in the Lord's mercy at some point today you've realized, "Oh my gosh! I have been choked out by the cares of this world. I have been deceived by the deceitfulness of riches."

The good news about that imputed righteousness that cannot be earned by that is, as Christians, it rests over us as a banner so that to step into the light and say, "I don't know if I can trust him," to step into the light and say, "Man, I have really given myself over to the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches" is not met with condemnation but forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

If you've ever wondered why Christians sing, why we rejoice, and why we get gladhearted about Jesus, it's because in the light of our shame, it's always met with grace. He does not heap condemnation upon those who have confessed their condemnation. He meets it with mercy. That's why we keep running to him. That's why we keep getting back up. Because mercies abound anew every morning for all of us who are in Christ. Let's pray.

Father, help us. It's not always easy to see, especially if we've been choked out, unconscious, just operating at deeper spiritual levels we're unaware of. Will you in your mercy give us eyes to see? Do that work of illumination. I pray for my brothers and sisters who have suffered, who have

experienced tribulation, who have experienced hardship because of the Word, because of life in a broken world. Would you build us up anew? Will you draw us back in to your goodness and grace?

For my brothers and sisters who are choking, gasping for spiritual air right now, just overwhelmed by the chaos in their life, some because of the world, some because of their own sinfulness, but the chaos of their lives, those who are being choked out as they put their trust more and more and more into their own hands rather than in your goodness and grace, I pray you would bring about freedom in their lives. We need your help. If you leave us on our own, we will wreck this. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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