

Message Transcript

PRESENCE OVER POSITION | THE KINGDOM REVEALED

AARON BROCKETT | AUGUST 29, 2026

Oh, man. So awesome. Honestly, I'm just grateful that you remember who I am. Hey, feel free to grab your seat if you would. I'm really thrilled to be back with you today. And for those of you who maybe are new around here, you are going, "Man, who are you?"

I've been away for a minute on a three-month sabbatical. You all, as well as our elders, graciously gifted it to us. And it was time well spent. I don't have time to kind of do a deep dive on everything about sabbatical. I do go into it a little bit more on our Taking Ground podcast that drops on Tuesday. So, if you are interested in hearing about this summer I talk about it in depth there. You can check it out.

Can I just say it this way? Sabbatical did what I needed it to do. There was some rest and some recalibration. There were parts of it that were hard. And some spiritual kind of soul work that went on. So it was a different kind of work. God had me in a place, kind of bringing me face to face with some things, that was really good, but at the same time really hard.

It was great. I got to spend some time with family, traveling. We all kicked it off at the beginning of the summer with our oldest daughter's wedding. And so here's a picture of our family on her wedding day. It was just super sweet. A great time with them—surreal.

It was just a joy for me to be able to take in our worship services and just be blessed by them without planning them or speaking into them. In fact, as I've been out and about I've bumped into a number of you around town and you've just talked about how great the guest speakers were. And you were a little too excited about that, might I add? But for good reason, because they were phenomenal. And we can just express our appreciation. Many of you have come up to me, "Man, where did you find these guest speakers?" These are just my friends. These are the guys I texted and said, "Hey, could you step in while I'm away to bless our church?" And they did so. You know, every single one of them would text me after their weekend here and just said, "Man, you've got such a great church and your people were just so encouraging and so great." And can I just thank you for loving on them? And honoring them. It made me so proud. And then can we just express our appreciation to our pastoral team and our whole staff? Over the summer they just did an amazing job, on the platform, off the platform, behind the



scenes. Man, they are secret sauce. God is just working through them in dramatic ways. And it's a blessing to me to get reports from all of that. Man, I missed you and I'm so ready to get back, especially this last month. I'm ready to come and run hard. Hope you've got your running shoes laced up as we run into this next season together.

And I'm really excited about the launching of our Westfield campus. It's going to happen just a few weeks away on September 20. And can I just ask you this as a church? Do a couple of things.

Number one: if you are a part of our church family and you attend another campus and you live in the Westfield city limits—specifically if you attend the Carmel campus and you live in Westfield—can I encourage you to make Westfield your home campus?

And the reason why is because we want to clear the way for as many people as possible and Carmel needs... We need to alleviate some pressure there. We need your parking spot and your seat. And that's a way for you to be on mission with us. So, if you live in Westfield, consider making Westfield your campus.

For the rest of our church family, if you would be praying that God would provide some land or a building for us to go permanent there. We're going to start portable there, and we don't have any leads right now. In fact, it's been a bit more challenging than what we anticipated.

That doesn't deter us, because for those of you who may have been in our church for a long time, you might remember this. It took 10 years to find this location. And, in fact, there were a couple of spots that were about to open up and (I was told about all of this because this was all prior to my time) and I go and I look at where we almost pulled the trigger—it was the wrong location. I believe that God's got a specific place and space for us in Westfield. So, would you just join us in praying for that. And I'd really appreciate it.

If you've got a Bible, go ahead and find Mark, chapter 9. That's where we are going to be together today. If you have been in our church this year, you know that we are taking the majority of this year to just take our time walking chapter by chapter, verse by verse through this fast-paced gospel of Mark. And we should have this wrapped up by the end of November, just in time for Christmas.



Today we are going to close out chapter 9, our text is going to be chapter 9, verses 30 through 50. Just a little bit of context as you are turning there in your Bible. Jesus and the disciples have been doing ministry in Galilee, which is about 100 miles north of Jerusalem. And now they are getting ready to make the trek down south to Jerusalem, which is where Jesus will ultimately be crucified, nailed to a cross for your sake and for mine. And listen as Mark writes these words from God to us today, saying this in verse 30:

"Leaving that region, they traveled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead.' They didn't understand what he was saying, however, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

"After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples. 'What were you discussing out on the road?' But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, 'Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.'

"Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me.'

"John said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he wasn't in our group.' 'Don't stop him!' Jesus said. 'No one who performs a miracle in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us. If anyone gives you even a cup of water because you belong to the Messiah, I tell you the truth, that person will surely be rewarded.

'But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around your neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands.

'If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.



'For everyone will be tested with fire. Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again? You must have the qualities of salt among yourselves and live in peace with each other.'" (NLT)
Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the weight and the weightiness and the authority of Your Word. So, today we willingly place ourselves under it knowing that the words were penned by Mark but they were written out by Your Holy Spirit. So, today I pray that You would open up our ears to hear what it is that You have to say to us, that we could remove distractions from our mind, all of those stray thoughts that would keep us from truly listening to what it is that You want us to hear today.

I pray that we would not only process what You just said with our minds, but that we would allow it to be digested into our hearts and manifested through our actions. We know that Your Holy Spirit is in this room, but we willingly invite You in, not because You need our permission to be here, but because we want to acknowledge that You are here and we need an encounter with You. So, would You please speak in these next few moments? Would You please remove my limitations as a communicator and do what only You can through Your Word. Your servants are listening. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.

In the winter of 1884 a young man with a promising future by the name of Theodore Roosevelt seemed to be destined for greatness at a national level. By the time he was 25 he had already been deemed by some to be one of the brightest young minds for politics in America.

After completing his education at Harvard, he was already an assembly man in New York state. Ambitious, smart, and well networked power and position seemed inevitable for his future.

However, on February 14 of that year, his entire world would come crashing down around him. You see, two days earlier his 22-year-old wife, Alice, had just given birth to their first child—a baby girl.

And his mother, Martha, was staying with them, as mothers-in-laws tended to do when grandbabies are born. However 48 hours later, she had come down with Typhoid Fever and was laying downstairs in bed, while at the same time his young wife, Alice, lay upstairs suffering from Bright's disease further complicated by the birth of their child. And, tragically, on Valentines Day, of all days, both his wife, Alice, and his mother, Martha, would pass away within hours of one another. Here is his journal entry on that day. It just simply said, "The light has gone out of my life."



This unexpected tragedy sent this young man full of promise, power, and position into a place he likely never thought he would be. Full of grief, he gave up politics, left his newborn daughter with his sister in New York, traveled 2,000 miles west to the Dakotas, a harsh terrain that he felt was a reflection of his own life in that season.

In fact, French fur traders had described it as the Moniterra Travesa, which means bad lands to travel through. And it's why we call it today The Badlands, filled with deep ravines and jagged cliffs, extremely hot summers, and brutally cold winters. It was almost as if he had found a place that mirrored the brutal grief of his loss. He had seemingly gone from a life full of promise to a life full of plight, a life destined for position yet now somehow deemed doomed to the periphery.

And yet, while there he purchased a couple of ranches. Apparently real estate was much more reasonable in the 1800s. And he went all John Dutton before Taylor Sheridan could ever write the script for Yellowstone, becoming a cattle rancher, a hunter, and an all around man's man.

And earning the respect of those native to the area, he learned to navigate the harsh environment. So much so, that it has been said that The Badlands are credited to have turned Teddy Roosevelt into a bad man—and I mean that in the best sense of the term.

And I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking, "Pastor Aaron, why are you telling us all of this? And where is this going?" Clearly I had a little extra time on my hands to do some reading this summer while on sabbatical. But there is a better reason than that.

See, what I want you to see is, here was a man destined for a position of greatness by all worldly metrics yet life led him into a position of pain and grief, which life has a potential to do. However, this harsh place, instead of crushing him, it formed and shaped him into someone who would eventually find himself in the most powerful position in the known world.

You see, the man who exited The Badlands years later was not the same man who went in. It formed him into a completely different man so that, when he returned to New York, he was courageous in the face of pressure, he was calm in the face of crisis, he was humble in the face of success, and he was resilient in the face of difficulty.



And he would need every ounce of grit that he had acquired during those years in The Badlands because, eventually, one day when President William McKinley was assassinated, it would be Theodore Roosevelt who would be thrust into the most powerful position in the world as the youngest president in U.S. history, at the age of 42.

In fact, during a speech he gave on September 5, 1910, he said these words, "I never would have been President if it had not been for my experience in North Dakota."

You know what he didn't say? "I never would have been president if I hadn't have graduated top of my class and gotten into Harvard." He didn't say, "I never would have been president if I hadn't signed up for that Linked In account and gotten that network through that social thing. No, he said, "I never would have found myself in this position of greatness if it had not been through my formation through the presence of pain."

In our passage today, the question of position and greatness is clearly on the minds of the disciples. And if we're honest, it seems a little petty. Does it not? Like, this is the fourth service where I've preached this passage and every single time I come to the spot where it says they were arguing about who was the greatest I can hear chuckles in the crowd.

I've read this passage hundreds of times throughout the years and I've always thought the same. I read it and I'm just like, "Well, that seems really ridiculous. Why are you guys arguing about who is the greatest?" And we think that it is petty.

And I start to find myself... I don't know if any of you are like me, I start to find myself feeling a little bit prideful that I'm not prideful like them. Because we read what happened, we just don't stop to think why it happened. What's the motivation behind the argument? There is always a motivation.

See, it's really interesting timing that they would have this argument because for the second time in Mark's gospel Jesus says to them clearly that He is willingly going to travel to Jerusalem and lay down His position and sacrificially give His life on a cross for the world.

In other words, Jesus is on His way to His own Badlands experience, so to speak, that would lead Him straight to a cross. Philippians 2 describes this so well, it says, "Jesus, though He was God did not consider equality with God," position, "as something to be grasped and held onto. But He let go of it and He emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant for you and me." And the disciples just didn't get it.



Jerry Vines in his commentary on Mark points out that whenever Jesus talks about going to a cross, it seemed to bring out some sort of spiritual flaw in the lives of the disciples. And this is a big one. Like, of all of the moments to start an argument about who is number one, this isn't it. Jesus essentially said, "Load up boys. We're taking a road trip to Jerusalem." And they all yell out, "Shot gun."

Fellas, read the room. See, why do you think they got into this argument? What do you think triggered it? Well, it's quite possible... If you were here last week, Pastor Chad did a great job of walking us through The Transfiguration where Jesus is transfigured in front of them, but not all of them got the invite to go. Jesus picked three: Peter, James, and John.

And they sat in the box seat, the best seat, of Jesus' transfiguration. And the rest of the disciples they were probably, I don't know, watching the game eating a sandwich. They were like, "Where are Peter, James, and John?" And all of a sudden the guys come walking in with this wicked tan. Like, "Where have you guys been?" "Well, just a little transfiguration action." "Why did you guys get to go and we didn't?" "I don't know, look in the mirror." And then it's on and they start arguing.

What do you think motivated the argument? I think it's important for us to acknowledge that because it's easy to miss this. They were just being really immature. But the same thing that motivated them to get into an argument is the same thing for you and me to strive for position today. Do you think these guys were just a bunch of egomaniacs? Do you think they were just doing what guys do when they get around each other comparing biceps and beards? It's possible. It's just not likely.

I'm guessing the reason why they got into the whole argument is the same thing behind our own struggle with clamoring for position as well. Whenever we find ourselves in that moment we are clinging to something that will give us security and we are trying to alleviate our fears.

You see, when life gets difficult and you feel threatened, isn't it tempting to grasp for position as a safety net to soothe our discomfort? If you notice in the gospel, Mark is not the only one, but Matthew, Luke, and John say the same thing. Every time Jesus starts talking to them about how He's not always going to be with them, they change the subject. They don't like it. They are uncomfortable. Why? Because they've left everything to follow Him and they've got their position, "Jesus, if You leave then we don't have our position anymore. Stop talking about that. We're going to hold onto you. We're going to hold on to our position of importance."



I don't know, man. Maybe right now there are three kinds of people. Those who have been through a Badlands. Those who are in a Badlands. Those who will go through a Badlands. And when you are in the middle of a Badlands season—I've actually talked to a number of you already over the weekend—it can leave you disoriented, wondering, "What in the world is going on? God, do You notice? Do You see? Do You have the power to deliver me out of this pain? Do You have the power to deliver me out of these circumstances?"

And when God doesn't seem to answer or respond to you in your timing, you are tempted to quite possibly give up or lose faith. And if so, that just means that you are human.

Maybe right now you've been believing for, hoping for, praying for circumstantial/positional changes in your life. It might be a relationship thing, a job thing, a financial thing, a health thing. Have you ever noticed how often our prayer lives...? Just stop and notice for a minute—if and when you pray, just jot down what you just prayed and you'll begin to notice that there is a potential theme there. It can be dominated by circumstances.

God kind of brought that front and center in my own life. Over sabbatical, He just kind of dropped this truth on me in one of the early mornings where He was like, "Hey, Aaron. If you'll just notice, every time you begin to pray, when you pray, you skip right past adoration, you skip right past gratitude, and you get to your laundry list of things that you'd like for Me to do for you."

And it's not that God doesn't want to do things for you, it's just that He doesn't want you to start there and stop there. So, oftentimes my prayer life can be dominated by the circumstantial. I just jump right in and I'm like, "God, I don't like this position I'm in. I don't like these circumstances I'm in. So, God, could You please change my circumstances? Could You please change my position? And then maybe give me some immediate relief?"

And while I'm waiting on God to answer and get on my agenda, I compare my circumstances or position with yours. I think that's what the disciples are doing. So, get this. They were so preoccupied jockeying for position around Jesus, that they were missing out on the very presence of Jesus. And we can do that on a Sunday morning in church. We can be in the position and miss His presence.

Now, don't get me wrong. Some of you just heard me say that God doesn't care about your circumstances. And you are leaning over to your spouse or your friend and saying, "We need to find a new church." I didn't say that.



I didn't say that God doesn't care about your circumstances. I didn't say that He doesn't care about your position. I didn't say that He doesn't want to change it. I just said He's not on your terms. He's on His. And it's not His primary concern. Here's why:

God is more interested in the long-term formation of your soul than the short-term resolution of your circumstances

God is more interested in the long-term formation of your soul than the short-term resolution of your circumstances. And if you are anything like me, then you don't like that. In fact, some of you are like, "You want to walk that back, Pastor? Sabbatical made you a little bit spicy. We liked you better before."

No, it's the reason why the passage doesn't end at verse 34, but it goes on. What I need you to know is that verses 35 to 50, if you have a paper Bible and you could write a word over section 35 to 50, write this word: Formation. It's formation talk. Which, by the way, is why it is tough to read. Did you not sense it in the room when I was reading the text? We got to verses 35 to 50, that was hard to read.

By the way, don't let anybody feed you some sort of nonsense by reducing Jesus to just this nice, loving, passionate, affirming, you do you kind of a Savior. Anybody who has ever said that, have them read verses 35 to 50 because He says some things that are tough but He says it out of love for you and me. See: The Lord will sometimes leave you longer in a place you don't want to be in order to shape you into who He wants you to become. The Lord will sometimes leave you longer in a place you don't want to be in order to shape you into who He wants you to become. And God is so loving and He is so just and He is so wise that if you and I are asking Him to change our circumstances or position, and by doing so, if it would short circuit the formation of your soul, then He will lovingly say no or not yet.

That is Parenting 101. How many of you let your two-year-old dictate your life or your agenda? And if you do they grow up to just be big kids.

You see:

Salvation is about getting you into Heaven

Formation is about getting you ready for Heaven

So, could I ask you this? What will it be for you today? Right now, did you come in here, are you praying for are you hoping for are you looking for a breakthrough? And God is certainly the God of breakthroughs. But the problem is when we try to impose our definition of breakthrough onto God and we reduce breakthrough to mean and only mean that it changes my circumstances—I go from one set of circumstances to another by the time I say: Amen.



One position to the next. From lonely and single to someone in love. From failing marriage to flourishing marriage. From unemployed to employed. From a one bedroom apartment to 5,000 square feet. From sickness to health. From anxiety to peace. From poor to rich. From a nobody to somebody.

And God can do those things. And sometimes He does those things. And we give Him all the glory for it and we celebrate it. But what if He doesn't? What if He doesn't in that moment? See the truth is that God is capable of breakthroughs, but He is more concerned with who you are becoming.

And what we see in the text is that Jesus never once—notice this—He never once scolds or shames the disciples for having the conversation about greatness. He never once said, "You shouldn't aspire to that." So, don't read the text and come away with that understanding. Instead He redirects their focus and redefines their definition of greatness—how it can be achieved and what it achieves.

You see, the world's definition of greatness, which is what the disciples were operating on, is purely positional. And it's measured by rank, importance, visibility, and promotion. And it's the same equation that we are running in the back of our minds when we monitor social media followers or likes, seating charts at weddings, or whether or not you are in boarding group one on a Southwest flight. And Jesus flips the definition upside down and He says this counter cultural thing. If anyone would be first, you've got to be willing to be last and servant of all.

Do you want to know what immediately jumps into my mind? It's like, "Well, are you saying I should be treated as a doormat?" No, that's not what He is saying. "Are you saying that I shouldn't speak up and advocate for myself?"

That is not what He is saying. He's simply saying, "Hey, would you please live your life for an audience of One and trust that I see?" There is nothing that is kept in secret. And you don't need to go pursuing greatness, greatness will find you as you begin to humble yourself under King Jesus.

He does not say that ambition is the problem or the desire to matter is wrong. He simply relocates greatness rather than condemning the desire for it. You might say, "What's the difference?"

Personal ambition says: I want people to recognize my name

Godly ambition says: I want the Lord to be pleased with my heart

Personal ambition says this: I want people to recognize my name. Godly ambition says: I want the Lord to be pleased with my heart. And that requires a desire to be in His presence over being in a position of importance. If you find yourself in The Badlands right now, it's not that He's forgotten about you but it's quite possibly where He is forming you without the distraction of applause.



So, Jesus says to the disciples four things that combat this desire within each one of us to clamor for position over presence. Let me give them to you really quickly and then we'll unpack them slowly, one by one, if you are taking notes. He just simply says these four things right out of the text. If you want to be great:

Serve without an agenda
Surrender the impulse to be territorial
Stop tolerating your sin
Stay salty

Those are the four things he says. Now, let's go back through, unpack it, then I'll be done.

Serve without an agenda
First thing he says to the guys is, "If you want to be great, you want to live a life of significance, you want to endure through The Badlands," He just says, "would you be willing to serve with no agenda?"

Have you noticed how often, even in our own hearts and minds, we can begin to do something sacrificial, something humble, but in the back of our minds we're always posturing or positioning thinking we might get something out of it? Verses 35 to 37 says, "If you want to be first, you need to be willing to be last." And that is about the most counter cultural thing ever. Where in the world do you hear that anywhere else? We live by the mantra: Whoever wants to be first must be first.

I remember back when I was in elementary school in the 1980s and I learned this lesson then. We would go out for recess. It would be super hot outside. We go inside and there would be a long line at the water fountain. It would be like a mile long. And you are dying of thirst.

And I remember being back there and I would scan the line to find one of my buddies. If my buddy was up farther in the line, if I could see a buddy, I might walk up to him and I would say this little phrase. I don't know if any of you remember it or if you ever used it. But I would say, "If you give me ups, I'll give you ups."

And it was a way of saying, "Hey, would you let me cut in line in front of you? If you do that, then I'll let you get in front of me." And I thought I would stop playing that game in grade school. But I did not. We just figure out how to take that game into high school and into college and into our careers and into our relationships.



And Jesus says, "Would you forget about posturing and just begin to serve and trust that I see what is done in secret?" See, the word for serving here is the Greek word diakonos. It's not a title, it's a function. It's somebody whose value is defined by what they do for others—get this—who can't give anything to them in return.

What Jesus calls them to here isn't an abstract theory. He is not calling you to just petty self-deprecation like, "Aw shucks, I'm just no good." He's not saying that. He's calling you to an action. It's actively taking on the nature of a servant to find the person in the room who has the least to offer you in return and figuring out a way to serve him without any thought for what you might get out of it.

And then Jesus holds up a child. The Greek word here is the word for infant or a toddler, we're talking about a young, young child, as an illustration to what He just said. And a child in that culture had no legal standing, no ability to advance its position, no way to pay you back. He says, "I want you to be like them." They are standing in a circle debating rank and Jesus interrupts by putting the least strategically valuable person in the room in the center of it.

And the answer isn't to stop being ambitious, because listen. Some of you are ambitious and that's the way God has wired you and there is no shade or shame on that. That's the way that He's put you together. Some of you have lots of ability. Some of you are skilled. Some of you are successful.

And He's not saying that you shouldn't be ambitious, He's saying, "I want to redirect your ambition so that others become the beneficiaries of it. That's true greatness. Greatness isn't revealed in the boardroom or on a platform. But it's how you treat someone when there is nobody else watching. And they can't do anything for you in return.

One of the things that I love about our church is when I pull into one of our campuses and I see people serving in the parking lot when it's negative 10 outside—praise God for central Indiana in the winter. And I see people serving in Kids Ministry and serving as greeters. I know they are just in regular street clothes. I know their occupation or career and it's maybe something that our culture holds in high esteem.

We've got surgeons and engineers and CEOs just serving others and they have no agenda, no flex. They are not trying to get anything out of it. They are just here to serve. Man, can I just encourage you to serve with no agenda? Can I encourage you to man your station?



Some of you may have been attending for a while and you've not begun to serve. Now, not just serving in the church, it's also serving out in the community. And we shouldn't pit the two against each other, "Well, I don't serve here but I serve out in the community." That's great. You should because we're going to get to this in a minute—be salt and light in the community.

But there is a difference between representing Jesus out there in the community and also serving to build up the body of Christ with what is happening here. So, can I just encourage you to find a way to serve? Could you maybe just write down this challenge in your Bible or in a journal? Every day I will serve someone; I'll give to someone.

Maybe it's in a Starbucks line, you'll pay for their coffee behind you, whatever, "And I'm not going to ask for any recognition. I'm not looking for what I can get out of it. God, I just want to live my life. I'm actually just going to be sacrificial and trust that I'm doing it for an audience of One." Guys, when you do that, you don't have to search for greatness, greatness finds you. That's what He's saying. Surrender the impulse to be territorial

The second thing that He says here is, "I want you to surrender the impulse to be territorial." Just to remind you what happened in the passage, in the middle of this whole conversation John says to Jesus, "Hey Jesus," "...we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he wasn't in our group." And Jesus says, "Don't tell him to stop."

So, what's going on? Well, another passage you could look to, you don't need to turn there right now, but you can look at it later. It's Acts 19, verses 13 to 14. It indicates that there were some Jewish exorcists that would sometimes use the name of Jesus in their work. And there that practice was condemned. They were told to stop. And I think the difference was because they weren't really true followers of Jesus, they had no sympathy for Jesus, they were just simply using His name because they knew it had power behind it as a magical incantation.

But here, Jesus seems to know the guy's heart. And He's like, "Hey, he may not be full on just yet but he's tracking. And don't tell him to stop because as he begins to use My name, I'm going to draw him into a relationship with Me. That seems to be what Jesus is saying. But John was objecting because the man wasn't a part of their small group.

Now, the equivalent for us today, if John and Jesus were having this conversation today, it might sound something like this, "Jesus, we told him to stop because he was a Presbyterian." "Jesus, we told him to stop because he went to a different church." "Jesus, we told him to stop because he has a different worship style than what we are used to."



Guys, can I very gently point this out? There is so much friendly fire right now within the body of Christ. And Satan is having a hey day with it. It's mostly online, but not all of it.

You've heard me talk about the fact that I'm hopeful and prayerful that we will experience a fifth Great Awakening in my lifetime. I'm praying for that. I don't think it's happened. But I'm praying for that. I'm praying for revival. I don't think we're in one. I do think we are in resurgence. What God has begun doing in our church over the last two years and what I'm seeing Him doing around the country and even in parts of Europe and China is amazing.

I do believe that there is a resurgence, but two things are happening. You've heard me say this before. Two things are happening. When there is a movement of the Holy Spirit, there's going to be movement of unholy spirits. So, if there is a resurgence (and the winds of the Holy Spirit are blowing—specifically in the younger generations right now) Satan isn't just going to roll over and let that happen.

He will attack. And he attacks in multiple ways. If you're a serious follower of Jesus, your head needs to be on a swivel right now to understand the ways in which he attacks. He attacks through false doctrine and he attacks through sin and he attacks through ethical and moral failure.

He also attacks through cynicism and bitterness. And oftentimes that is a chink in our armor because all of us have been hurt. I'm not going to ask you to do it, but if I were I'd say, "Hey, man. If you've been hurt by somebody raise your hand." We'd all raise our hands. "If you've been hurt by somebody who claims to follow Jesus," all of us would raise our hands because godly people can sometimes do very ungodly things. And we all know that.

I know a number of you are here and you are experiencing church hurt and you're kind of sitting in the back and you're just trying to heal up. And I just encourage you to take all of the time you need to heal up and do what you need to do. But can I just very lovingly encourage you not to allow cynicism and bitterness to enter your heart because that's how Satan loves to weasel in and he actually loves to quench a move of the Holy Spirit through cynicism and bitterness. And he just draws these lines of division.

Any of you ever see another church in town that you were a little suspect of and then something happens. Maybe some moral thing. Some scandal or they go off the rails or there is division. And you don't say anything but maybe inside your heart you just kind of gloat a little bit, "Yeah, I knew that was coming." Or you contribute to the rumor mill in the comment section. And in those moments you need to repent of that, grieve over that because Jesus only has one church.



He only has one church. And if the church has its Bible open and its eyes on Jesus, they may not do everything the way that you love to do it, they might not be right on everything, we certainly aren't either, but we need every church to be on its game to advance the Kingdom of God forward. Jesus said, "Don't draw lines." Don't draw lines. Don't be territorial.

And if you thought that was hard, Jesus really goes hard in the paint next. He says:
Stop encouraging and tolerating sin

In verses 42-48 He says:

"But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around your neck."

He's basically saying, "Enticing or leading anyone into sin is a serious deal. Especially a child. And then He uses two Greek words for millstone. One millstone is a really big one, and then there is a really little one. Jesus uses the Greek word for the big one to talk about how serious He is about this. And then

He says this:

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off."

Would you not agree that this is a startling metaphor? And it is a metaphor. It's hyperbole. And He's using it to describe the seriousness of sin. It's kind of like this. If you had an infection in your arm and the surgeon said, "We need to remove the limb because we don't want the infection to get into the body and take your life," it would be really horrible to lose your limb, but it would be worse to lose your life. That's kind of similar to what He's saying here.

Now, here's the rule for Bible interpretation. Whenever you read something like this, the first question you have to ask is, "What is He not saying?" So, He's not suggesting that you literally start hacking off body parts. There were some early church fathers that took it literally and it didn't end well. Alright? What Jesus is doing is He is using exaggeration and hyperbole to make a point.

And, by the way, we do this all of the time. Any of you ever said to someone, "I could eat a horse."? Yeah, I hope you don't literally mean that you are going to show up at the Kentucky Derby with silverware. No, you are just using an analogy. You're just like, "Man, I'm really, really hungry."



Jesus is emphasizing the seriousness of sin and the need to do whatever is necessary to deal with it and to remove it. He's like, "I don't want you to play around with this thing. I don't want you to try to manage your sin. I want you to repent of it and cut it off." He's not necessarily saying, "I actually want you to gouge your eyeball out," but He could say, "I need you to get your phone out of your room."

In Romans, chapter 8, verses 12 through 13 he says:

"... you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die."

That's not a threat, it's a warning. And, by the way, if you follow the sin to its end, it always brings death. Death to the relationship. Death to the marriage. Death to your spiritual life. Death to your finances. Death to your mental peace.

"But if through the power of the Spirit,"

Which is the only way you can overcome it. You can't white knuckle your way to holiness:

"you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live." (NLT)
You will thrive.

Colossians 3:5:

"So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you." (NLT)

It's interesting that he would say it that way—it's lurking within you. We're all just one decision away from stupid. There is always stuff lurking in us. And we can get so comfortable with sin in our lives that we don't even like to call it sin, we just like to say, "I'm struggling." You ever notice that? "I'm struggling."

Well, no. Maybe there is a specific sin that we need to call out. And we don't like to realize that it is the very thing that the enemy wants to use to destroy our lives, our reputation, our relationships, and our witness for God.

See, the truth about sin is that very few of us fear, or like to fear, that it never introduces itself to you as your enemy. It always introduces itself to you as your friend. And it seems harmless until it's not.

I don't know if any of you remember the show on the Las Vegas strip, Sigfried and Roy. That show was on the strip for years and years and years. And the signature moment of the show was when they would walk out on stage with full grown white tigers and lions and play around with them like they were innocent kittens.



Year after year, show after show nothing bad ever happened. And it just kind of looked like something normal. The audience got used to it. They got used to it. And it looked like they had tamed something that ultimately could never truly be tamed.

And then in 2003 the unthinkable happened. One of the tigers did what tigers do. At the end of the show it attacked Roy in front of the audience, clamping down on his throat, dragging him off stage. And people thought it was a part of the show. They thought, "Oh, they are just putting a new twist to it." But it wasn't a show. And he was badly injured—lost a lot of blood. He survived but he suffered physical damage for the rest of his life until he eventually passed away in 2020.

They cancelled the show not long after the accident. And in interviews with people who were there they said things like this, "We couldn't believe it." "We were stunned." "There is just no explanation for the attack." "We don't understand. The tiger is usually under control." They'd never seen one of those wildlife shows.

That is the stupidest thing I've heard in my life. They thought that they could control the thing that was ultimately never going to be fully controlled. And they became convinced that the thing designed to overpower them could be managed. And the same is true with sin.

Do you want to know the lie that every person who has ever blown up their life told themselves? I can handle it. It's not that bad. It's not that big of a deal. It's harmless. And you are right, it is. Until it isn't.

And some of us, we've invited the kitten into the living room and that kitten eventually grows up to be a tiger that will eventually—maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next year—will turn on you. And Jesus just simply says, "Stop tolerating these things that are lurking in your heart. Do whatever you can ahead of time to aggressively part ways with what is killing your soul."

One of the most common questions that I get as a pastor is this question, "Are we allowed to _____." Do you know what that question is? Where is the line? Any of you farmers, any of you keep cattle or sheep inside of a pen? Where are the worn pathways? Are they in the middle of the field or are they right up next to the fence? And as human beings that's what we do too. We find the line and we run up and down it. And then we slip and fall on the other side of the line and we wonder what happened.



And then Jesus says this. He says:

“It’s better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It’s better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out. It’s better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.”

He mentions hell multiple times here. And the reason why I point that out to you is because Jesus talked about hell more than anyone else in the Bible, including John the Baptist and Paul. Does that surprise you? He’s the most loving, compassionate, accepting, gracious, forgiving person to ever walk the earth and He talked about hell more than anyone else.

Does that sound inconsistent? Well it shouldn’t. Because the reason why Jesus talks about it so much is not because He’s threatening you of it but because He doesn’t want you to go there.

I don’t know if anybody is like me, but I don’t really have the fear of heights unless little kids are around. If little kids are around, I’m a nervous wreck around heights because I can’t help it, my mind just gets away from me and I just keep imagining them falling to their death. It’s twisted and it’s morbid. Please pray for me.

When my kids were like really little we went to the Grand Canyon. I did not enjoy anything about it because I was constantly a nervous wreck. I was like, “Look out. There’s the edge. Don’t fall. You could fall to your death. There’s the edge of the Grand Canyon.” And I just kept talking about it and talking about it and talking about it.

And if they didn’t know any better they could say, “Man, dad’s really morbid about this whole thing about falling into the Grand Canyon. He keeps talking about it so much.” No, the reason why I kept talking about it was because I didn’t want them to fall.

And that’s why Jesus talked about it more than anybody else. Not because He’s relishing the idea of anybody going there, but because He doesn’t want you to. And here He uses a word for hell, the word for hell is Gehenna. And what Jesus is doing is simultaneously He is talking about a real, literal, eternal conscious place of punishment, but He’s using a real place in Jerusalem to describe at least a portion of how bad it is.

Gehenna referred to a deep valley on the southwest side of Jerusalem in the New Testament, which was a garbage dump where fires constantly burned. In the Old Testament, in pre-Israelite days, it was the literal site of child sacrifices to Molech. It was an awful place.



In Inter Testament times it became the garbage and sewage dump of Jerusalem and a symbol of the place of punishment because worms and fires were constantly consuming the refuse.

So Jesus is trying to describe a place that is worse than what you could ever imagine. And you might say, "Well, I don't know that I really believe in a literal hell. How could a loving God ever send people to hell?" And I don't think that He sends anyone there. He gives you what you ultimately want. He will not force Himself on you. He will not force Himself on you for you to spend eternity with Him.

And a loving God does not not talk about it. A loving God talks about it and ensures that it is a reality that you never have to face. And it is why Jesus went to a cross. He wants to give you the assurance of salvation and He wants to eliminate those fears and for there to be no question.

In 1 John, chapter 5, verse 13 it says:

"I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life." (NLT)

He doesn't want you guessing. He doesn't want you to go, "Well, I hope I've done enough. I hope I've been a good enough person." He's like, "No, no, no. I don't want you guessing. I want you to know that you know that you know." And so He gives you precise instructions on how to spend eternity with Him. Man, if you were to fly into an airport in a strange city and you've got to get to a hotel, and you call an Uber, which maybe the majority of you have done, and the Uber would give you specific instructions on what bay to go to in the car pick up line.

And if it says, "Go to bay 43 for the Uber that is going to pick you up," and you're like, "Well, that seems a little stringent. I'm going to go to bay 15 and do me." Well, then you're probably walking to the hotel. And you wouldn't say, "Well, this seems really rigid and unloving for an Uber to tell me specifically where to go." Or maybe they are just trying to be precise.

See, God doesn't want you guessing. He wants to give you assurance with precise coordinates so that you will not fear.

Stay Salty

And then the last thing that Jesus says is, "I want you to stay salty." And He talks about this fire that tests you. He's not talking about the fires of hell here. He's talking about fires as a metaphor for purification. And He's talking about how salt is good for seasoning, but if it loses its flavor how do you make it salty again?



And for those of you who are chemists you know that the compound for salt can never lose its saltiness. It's actually talking about the things that are unpure that get bound with the salt that dilute it. And He's talking about how fire and salt kind of purifies our faith. That for all of us, when we go through these Badlands, what Jesus is doing is He is not forgetting about you, He's trying to form you and shape you. It's why 1 Peter, 1 would say:

"These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold." 1 Peter 1:7 (NLT)

In chapter 4, verse 12 it says:

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials," or Badlands, "you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you." (NLT)

God is refining you. And in first century Palestine salt was essential in a hot climate. We use salt to flavor our food. So when we talk about being salt in society I think oftentimes that's what we automatically think of, "Oh, I need to put a little Jesus dust in my relationships. I'm trying to salt them."

Well, maybe that could be part of it but in first century Palestine it was much, much more than that because salt was essential in a hot climate because without your Kenmore fridge, salt was the practical means of preserving food. So, when Jesus said to them, "Be salty," He's not talking about being flavorful, He's talking about being preservatives of the Kingdom—be distinctive and different than the world. Restrain evil and slow moral decay. Be preservatives of the Kingdom on earth. In other words, Jesus is saying, "If you want to be great, that's how to be great."

And don't just have the appearance of salt, be purely salt. And that happens when we place ourselves before Jesus with our motivations and our fears and our insecurities over and over and over again. And we ask Him to come and purify and form our faith. Because salvation—Jesus has already done everything sufficient for your salvation. But formation is the heavy lifting of being shaped into the person that He died for you to be.

So, as we come to a place of decision, what I want you to know right now is that the last five minutes of every service, that's not the time to duck out and try to beat everybody out of the parking lot. That's the time when you actually do some business with God.

In fact, these last five minutes may be the most important minutes of our time together. We've sung, we've settled in, we've heard the Word, and now the Spirit is here working on us. And you can do one of two things with that. You can say, "It's not that bad, let's go to lunch." Or, you can say, "I need to do something about this right now."



So, what will it be for you? As I walked through those four things is there any one of them that kind of hit you? Like, "You know, I've been struggling with kind of a hidden sin that I've just kind of managed." Or, "I've been gossiping about other people." Or, "I've allowed cynicism or bitterness into my heart."

Or, "I volunteered to be a Difference Maker but I didn't get the applause that I thought I was going to get. I thought somebody was going to invite me to be on staff and that never happened. So, I got disillusioned." Maybe you've served somebody at work thinking that, "If you give me ups, I'll give you ups." Didn't happen.

Maybe right now you have the appearance of a Christian but you don't have any internal qualities of one. Maybe you've got what we might call a showroom faith. But when you take that thing offroad it falls apart. What would it be for you?

I think the large percentage of us aren't arrogant or fearful, "But if God is not going to come through for me, then I need to come through for me." So, right now we are a mixed bag of motives. We've got all kinds of things lurking inside of our hearts. And right now I just want to give you the opportunity to take a position and a posture of humility before the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Because, we're not so different from the disciples.

And so, we're going to stand and we're going to sing out of response and I want to invite you to come to the altar, so to speak. And I think it is really important that we do physically with our bodies what we're feeling emotionally and spiritually in our hearts. I think it brings the two into alignment.

When I was growing up in church (I'm just going to confess this out loud) during the invitation time when I would see people come down front, fill the aisles and they would be in tears or they would be praying with people (I'm not proud of this) and I would oftentimes think, "Man, I wonder what they did? They must really be messed up."

And over the years I've begun to recognize that I don't think that they are the ones who are messed up, I think they are the ones who are finally honest about the truth and they are seeking the Lord for help. Quite possibly the truly messed up people are the ones standing at their seats thinking, "It's not that bad, yet. I can still manage it."



So, could I just ask you to just be willing to humble yourself and ask the Holy Spirit of God to reveal some things to you that maybe you don't even see. And maybe right now you've been trying to get God on your agenda rather than being on His. I just want to invite you to come down front, to drop to your knees in the presence of King Jesus.

Listen. We are not doing this just to get a little spiritual high every week. We are doing this to be a church that is a preservative of the Kingdom coming. That's what we mean by taking ground for the Kingdom, that we might be preservatives of the Kingdom of God.

And He is looking for some not perfect people but people who are willing to be vulnerable and authentic and to come to Him over and over again with all of our agendas and all of our mixed bag of motives, repent of our sins. If any of us are asking God to relieve us of our circumstances—repentance of sin. So we just want, in a very tender moment, just invite you to come.

Stand to your feet at all of our locations and let me pray.
Father, we thank You for Your Word. And we thank You for the parts that not only make us feel good about ourselves, but even the parts that sting a little. And there are several things in that passage that are hard to hear. And so, God, I pray that right now we would take the posture of a humble servant and trust in due time that You will lift us up.

Some of us are in a Badland experience right now. Nothing seems to be going right. And, Father, we repent of bringing our circumstances to You asking You to get with our program. We want to get on Yours. And so, would You please bind up wounds? Would You please alleviate our fears? Would You please tend to our insecurities and illuminate any sort of motive that might desire to self-promote? And that we would willingly follow Your lead.

You were in the very position of God, yet did not consider equality with God something to hold onto, but You let go of it for us. So, we want to do the same for You in return. And we ask that when we do that that we don't need to go clamoring for greatness, greatness will find us in due time as we seek to follow You.

So, we ask this in the powerful name of King Jesus. And everyone said: Amen. We're going to sing and as we do you just feel free to come up front.

