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[Aaron Brockett]

Well I'm really excited to introduce to you our guest speaker for the weekend, which seems unusual for me to say that, especially for those of you who have been around for a while. But if you're new to our church and you don't know who he is, Jake Barker served on our team for over a decade. He is a phenomenal communicator, a great leader, and in December of this past year we sent him and his wife Trudy and their three great kids out to Santa Barbara to start a brand new church—Mission City Church.

We are partnering with them financially. We are supporting them in every way we can. I know many of you have been generous toward them—some of you've been out there. They are going to be starting up in September of this year. That is their grand opening. I know Jake is going to give you a great update as to the many things God is doing in and through their church so we wanted to get him back this summer in front of all of you to celebrate what God is doing out there.

Would you please give a warm Traders Point welcome to our friend and family member Jake Barker?

[Jake Barker]

What's up? Hey, it's so good to see you guys again. Thank you. Thank you. You guys are too much.

It's so good to be back. This is so much fun for my family. My name is Jake for those of you I haven't met. Over my ten years here I got to do all kinds of things like help start campuses, so a shout out to North and Downtown and West. Help me welcome them. I'm so glad you guys are here and so proud of what you are doing.

Six months ago we moved to Santa Barbara, California to start a new church. And we miss you guys. California is so far away. I don't know if you knew that. If you keep going, it is just the ocean. That's it. Things are different there. You pay for gas in gold bars. I thought that was unnecessary, but that's what they do.

We are adjusting. We probably moved at the craziest time of all. I don't know if you were paying attention at all to Santa Barbara six months ago, but it was on fire, literally on fire. We moved into the single largest wildfire in the history of California. The hills were on fire, there was ash falling from the sky, and we thought, "We have moved to hell." Look at this picture of our kids at the airport when we landed. This is what it looked like for them. It was crazy.

[Picture did not come up on screen]

Oh, well. Fine. I didn't want to show it anyway. So, it was absolutely insane.

But what it did was give us an immediate opportunity to start loving our city. Because of the way you guys have been generous with us, we were able to feed over 20 people for two weeks. They were displaced from their homes due to the fires and the mudslides. So we were able to immediately love on the new city we moved into because of the way you guys are helping us out. I think you deserve a round of applause for making that happen. Well done on that—for helping us serve our city.

Now that it is not on fire, we have started to become Californians. We are super into recycling now. Everybody is into that. I'm a surfer. I've been surfing. I was on top of a surf board in the ocean. I feel like that counts. We learned that if someone invites you to a barbeque you don't know what to expect, because they are just going to make something hot on the grill. It may not be meat, it might be a mushroom. I'm not making that up. That happened.

My favorite California moment was the day I went to pick up our kids from the school. We love the school. It is about 50 percent Caucasian and 50 percent Hispanic. Our kids have made great friends and they love their teachers. There was this one interaction I saw this day between a teacher, her student, and the parent. The teacher was relying on the kid to translate from English to Spanish for his mom. The problem was the message he was supposed to translate was why he got in trouble that day.

And I thought, "There is no way this kid is accurately translating this message." He is saying, "Mom, she is crazy. She has it out for me. She has it out for us, if you know what I mean." Whatever he said, it was definitely not what he was supposed to be saying.

We're learning to love our new city, state, and friends and we are working hard to start the church God wants in Santa Barbara. So September 16 will be our first public worship service as Mission City Church. We're super pumped about that and can't wait to get going. Mission City is the name so it's a shout-out to the city of Santa Barbara. It started out as a Franciscan mission, as did many of the cities up and down the west coast.

We also know that, as followers of Jesus, when we allow him in and he starts changing everything about us we are put on mission. When a group of followers of Jesus live on mission the city is never the same. That's our prayer for the city of Santa Barbara. So we can replicate and send people out and do it in other places all over the world.

If you are the praying type, we would love for you to pray for us. Pray for the work that is ahead. From the bottom of our team's heart, we need to say, "Thank you." Your encouragement, friendship, and support has come at just the right time, right when our

knees were getting weak or we were getting a little tired or a little scared, you guys have come in and bolstered us. Mission City would not exist without Traders Point. Thank you for being who you are.

Today we are in week four of a sermon series called *Stories that Change Everything*. Over the last three weeks we've been working our way through these things called parables, which are really just stories that Jesus told. Now Jesus told stories for a very particular purpose. There are a lot of us, myself included, who don't like being told what to do, what to think, or what to believe.

So if Jesus had come to earth and said: Here is a list of things to believe now go believe them, that would have been hard for people like me. So what he did was wrap those truths in stories so we could understand them and they would be accessible for you and me. If you spend time in the Bible at all, if you give God a shot, you will find him over and over trying to make truth as accessible as possible to all of us. That's really important to him.

I love the way one preacher named Charles Spurgeon described Jesus: "He was the clearest, most straightforward, and most outspoken of all speakers. He knew what he meant to say, and he meant his hearers also to know."

So what Jesus is doing is telling these simple stories. There is not hidden meaning, no codes to break. They are straightforward. But just because they are simple doesn't mean they are easy. Those are two different things. Just because we can understand them doesn't mean it is easy for us to apply them to our lives. He is going to challenge, today, the way many of us have thought about God, the way many of us have lived our lives, and we're going to have a choice to make: Do I believe Jesus is who he says he is, that he will do what he says he will do, and that I should apply that to my life?

Now we've been using stories for many, many years to make a point through poets, authors, and screen writers. One of my favorite versions of a story is a good movie. I love movies, maybe you do too. One of my favorite kinds of movie is one that catches me off guard every single time. It's the movie where you end up rooting for a bad guy.

Have you ever done that? You're 45 minutes into the movie and you realize, "I think I'm actively hoping that guy commits a crime and gets away with it," I'm in. This started early with a children's movie, a cartoon called *Robin Hood*. Have you ever seen *Robin Hood*? It's about a fox that wears shirts, but no pants. And what he would do is he would rob from rich people then give it to poor people. That's a lot of moral reasoning for a six-year-old to process. How do I feel like wealth redistribution? Should we really take from the rich and give to the poor? I don't know, but I'm rooting for a bad guy.

Then there is the Ocean's franchise – *Ocean's Eleven*, 12, 13, and 8. And in *Ocean's Eleven*, not only are you rooting for one person to commit a crime, you're rooting for 11

people to commit a felony. Somehow you end up hating the guy they robbed. I don't know how they did it, but I loved it.

Maybe you saw *Black Panther* and you saw the coolest villain of all time Killmonger. I can't endorse Killmonger's methodology—I kill someone and brand my body each time I do it. I'm out on that. But he maybe had a point. Maybe Wakanda should have been more generous with their resources for the watching world. I think the villain was right.

Then, my favorite root-for-the-villain franchise of all times: *The Fast and the Furious*. I'm not being silly about that. I love it. I want them to steal cars. I want them to steal money. I want their kids to go to college and have a good life. I want all of it for them. I am so rooting for the bad guy.

Jesus, today, is going to tell a story that would have two characters. It is simple. There are just two people we have to keep up with—not complicated at all. There would have been a clear good guy and a clear bad guy. When his listeners were processing all of this they would have known immediately who was good and who was bad, who was supposed to win and who was supposed to lose.

But Jesus does not tell stories like we tell stories. He tells better stories. And he is going to tell it in such a way that his listeners are going to have this philosophical headache. And he is going to leave us with a choice. Again, the choice is: Do I believe Jesus is who he says he is? Do I believe Jesus will do what he says he will do? And should I live my life the way he says, or the way I've been living so far?

So let me introduce you to these two characters Jesus is going to talk about: a Pharisee and a tax collector

Now, anytime you're reading the Bible, anytime you're trying to understand the words of Jesus, the context matters. I'm talking about: When did he say this? Where was he when he said it? To whom was he speaking? All of that is important for us to understand why Jesus says what he says.

Because Pharisee isn't really a word we use a lot, we're going to spend a little bit of time getting to know this guy because it will help us understand the story. Now a Pharisee was one of the local religious leaders, one of the local Jewish leaders in the town. They were well educated, well trained, and well respected. Everybody looked up to a Pharisee.

A tax collector was the exact opposite. Everybody hated them. Everybody despised them. Everybody avoided them. Everybody talked behind their backs. We have two complete opposites—the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Now consider their social status, the social status of these two guys. The Pharisee was the most popular guy in town. Everybody loved him. He was the big man on campus. If you had a Pharisee over for dinner you were definitely taking a selfie and putting it on

Instagram to make all your friends jealous. You wanted to be around the Pharisee. Everybody loved them.

The tax collector was the exact opposite. In fact the reason people hated the tax collector was, number one: no one loves a tax collector. Second of all, they were working for the oppressive Roman government. So they were not only collecting taxes, but they were collecting taxes for a foreign country that was oppressing their people. As if that wasn't bad enough, they would overtax their own people and then pocket the profit. So they were working for the oppressive government, they were ripping off their own people, and everybody hated them. They were despised.

Think about the reputations of these two guys. The Pharisees were as buttoned-up, put together, as it gets. They had it all together. They were living the most outwardly perfect life you could imagine. The tax collectors, on the other hand, were shady. They lived in the shadows. No one respected the tax collector.

And then finally, and most important of all for our day to day: consider morality. The Pharisees were obsessed with following the Law. They were crazy about it. In fact, if they were going to drink a glass of wine they would strain it first to make sure no gnats got in their drink, because if they swallowed a gnat they would be ceremonially unclean and they would have broken the Law. That was a worse-case scenario for someone like that. The tax collectors, on the other hand, they threw away the Law a long time ago. They did whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, to whomever they wanted. These guys could not have been more different.

Jesus sets this up. So you know the good guy. The Pharisee is the good guy. The tax collector is the bad guy and Jesus is going to tell us a story about these two. Let's look at Luke 18. That's where we are going to hang out today. If you have a Bible or a Bible App, you can head that way. If you don't have any of that, the verses will be on the screen next to me.

We're going to begin in verse 9 of Luke 18. And Luke, the author, is going to set the scene for us. This is what he says: "Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else."

So this is the audience for Jesus' story. He is talking to this group of people who have grown incredibly confident in their own righteousness, their own ability to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing. They were very confident that they were good and other people were bad. It's almost like Luke is implying that when you're full of yourself, you become a jerk. That is what he was saying. He said these people had become so confident in their ability to be right that they looked down on everyone else.

Self-righteousness leads to contempt. In those moments we are so confident we are right. And if anyone else disagrees with us, we can't even fathom them being in this

world. We don't understand them. It's when we grow so confident in our goodness that we can't stand anyone else's badness. When we are full of ourselves, we become jerks.

But we were told somewhere along the way in our lives that we aren't supposed to be a jerk. So instead of not being a jerk, we just mask it really well. We start asking questions like this. This is the way self-righteousness sounds: How could they? Have you ever asked that question?

How could they think like that? How could they believe that? How could they act that way? How could they make that decision? How could they vote for that candidate? That's not the one I would vote for, and clearly I chose the best one. How could they watch that cable news program, when I watch this one and this is true and that is fake? How could they abandon their family to feed their addiction? How could they enter our country illegally? How could they confuse their sexuality? How could they do that?

And really, deep down, what we are asking is, "How could anyone live differently than I live? I am right. I am good. I've got it figured out." When we become so confident in our righteousness we sit in judgment of others' wrongs. And when we are so confident in our goodness we feel morally obligated to expose other peoples' badness. That is the audience Jesus was talking to. It sounds like an awesome party. That's who he is talking to.

Let's see how he tells the story beginning in verse 10: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.' But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Now this would have been scandalous. I'm talking jaw dropping on the floor scandalous. And I can tell by the fact that you did not audibly gasp, that you did not find it as scandalous as these people did. So we need to spend a little time breaking this down.

You see, Jesus just allowed the bad guy to win. That didn't happen, especially in the Jewish worldview. There was no frame of reference for the bad guy winning. It was always about being good. It was always about being obedient. It was always about following the rules. And Jesus just said: Somehow, the good guy lost and the bad guy won. Their minds were blown. So what Jesus was doing is using these two guys to compare and contrast, and we're going to do the same thing.

First of all, look at the posture. You can tell a lot about people by their body language. The Pharisee, he walked into that temple upright with his chest out, very confident in himself. He stood by himself so everyone could look at him. He put himself right by the Holy of Holies, where God's presence resides in the most important part of the temple—not because of anything other than he deserved to be there. That's where he belonged. This was not a privilege for him to stand there, this was his right. He was so good. Where else would he be?

The tax collector, he was barely in the temple. He was on the outside. He physically couldn't even lift his eyes up to pray. He felt the weight, the weight of what he had done, the weight of what he had said, the weight of what he had become. It's the weight of misery, shame, and the weight many of us are very familiar with. They were so different in posture.

Did you notice how differently they prayed? The Pharisee, he showed up and started praying with his resume of spirituality. He humble-bragged all the way home. He said: Here is who I am. I am not like this person. I am not like that person. I fast more than you even ask me to, God. I give you exactly what you require. God, you are welcome for me being this good.

And the tax collector in the back, he prayed one of the most beautiful prayers I've ever known. It wasn't long. It wasn't eloquent. It wasn't complicated. But it was beautiful: Oh God, be merciful to me. I am sorry. You can hear the pain in his voice. You can imagine the quivering of his lip. He knew who he was and he knew who God was and prayed accordingly.

They were different in their posture and their prayer. Jesus says the good guy walked away and he was still lost. It was the train-wreck tax collector who walked away justified. Justified means he was made right with God. Somehow the bad guy won. And this would have blown their minds.

Here is what Jesus is saying. This might sound crazy, and it may even sound wrong to you. But you have to give it a chance, not because I am saying it but because Jesus is: The most dangerous thing you could ever be is a good person.

Think about it. The most dangerous thing you and I could ever become in our lives is a good person. I know that sounds crazy, but Jesus is making a point and I think we should let him make it. You see, the danger of being a Pharisee was not in its obscurity. No one was looking at the Pharisee walking around town saying: That guy is a mess. They all thought he had it together. They thought he had the answers. He was so obedient. They said: That guy is so much more spiritual than I am.

What happened is that the Pharisee was so close. He was so close to the truth and it left him this far away from salvation. He was convinced that his meticulous obedience to God's Law would earn his way into God's favor. And he walked away from that temple

as lost as any one of us. It was the train-wreck tax collector, because he threw himself upon the mercy of God, who walked away made right with God. That is crazy.

Here's what happens. A lot of us, in our lives, have spent a lot of time doing the same thing the Pharisee did. It's a game of moral comparisons. It usually starts with this. I've had this conversation so many times in Indiana and a ton in California. It sounds like this: I'm not religious but I'm a good person.

Have you ever heard that one? I'm not religious, but I can still be a good person. Have you ever heard that from a friend? Have you ever said that yourself. The idea is this. I don't do God. I don't do church. I don't do faith. But I don't need all that stuff because I can still be a good person. The thinking goes, if we can live our lives and do good things—that is a life worth living.

I will occasionally be generous. I'll kind of text to give every once in a while and I'll feel good about that. I will try to reduce suffering for anyone I can. If anyone is in trouble, I'll try to help them as much as possible. I will try to speak positivity into the universe, whatever that means. That's what I'm going to do and I'll feel good about it because that is a good life. It's what it means to be a good person. I don't have to be religious, because it doesn't so much matter what I believe it just matters what I do. That's kind of the running philosophy.

But there is always a follow-up statement to that first one. Because given 35 to 40 seconds for any of us to list off our good accomplishments, we run out of material. We're not that good. So what happens is we say at the beginning, "I'm not religious but I'm a good person," but we back into this one. "I'm not perfect but at least I'm not *that* bad."

That's usually the follow-up statement. I don't have it all together. I say things I shouldn't say. I look at things I shouldn't look at. And I do things I shouldn't do. I'm not perfect, but I'm not as bad as those people. You've got the *those people* list in your pocket ready to pull out and compare yourself to at any given moment? I'm not like Hitler. I'm not like Dahmer. I'm not a terrorist. I'm not an abuser. I'm not perfect, but I'm not that bad.

Now if your life goal is to not be like Adolph Hitler, congratulations. You did it. You did it. There is a certificate and you can pick it up on the way out and put it on your wall. I just think maybe we can raise the bar a little bit.

Here's what I believe is true. It's up to you if you agree. At the end of our lives, when it's all coming down, I don't think you and I want to depend on a long list of these statements to justify our entire existence. I don't know that at the end of it you and I want to be looking people in the eyes and saying, "At least I wasn't that bad. At least I didn't hurt too many people. At least I left you some money. At least I wasn't the worst." That's not where we want to be. And Jesus is saying: There is a different way to see the world. There is a different way of wrapping it all up. There is a different way of living.



But we have to understand where that mindset comes from. The mindset comes from this: Every other way of living is a merit system. What that means is whether it's another world view, whether it's another world religion, and even if you're anti-religion you're always working on some sort of merit system. If our lives are built on anything other than Jesus, it is a merit system. What that means is that if I do a good thing, I get a point. If I do a bad thing, I lose a point. And really all of life is about scoring more good points than bad points then, at the end of my life, I lived a good life.

Some of us even think about God that way, as if he is a cosmic score keeper with a tally mark in his office just waiting and counting our good versus bad and then hopefully someday we'll have enough good in a column that he will love us.

At our house we have three kids—nine, seven, and three. So we are in the grind of trying to raise kids who honor boundaries, honor other people, and best-case scenario stay out of jail. That's what we're aiming at. So we created a system, a system where you get a point if you do a good thing. If you do a chore without complaining, if you say something nice to a family member you get a point. And then if you fuss and wine or don't do what you are supposed to do, you lose a point. That point goes to a sibling. That's our system.

As I'm saying it out loud, it sounds crazy but that's what we do. So one day, our nine-year-old daughter lost a point for complaining about something. Later she came to me and said, "Dad, am I going to grow up to be a bad person?" And so I knew I had one of those fatherly moments where I could make a real impact. So I got on my knees and looked her in the eyes and said, "Yes." I need her to stop whining, like yesterday. I signed up on Groupon for counseling. It's going to be fine. We're going to be fine.

That's how so many of us think about God, that he is up there waiting for us to mess up, waiting for us to keep score, and finally we'll break it. Here's the truth. Jesus didn't tell that story. That's not the story he chose to tell when he was trying to describe to us what it means to relate to God. In fact, he told a story where the bad guy wins. He told a story where all the goodness didn't do anything for that Pharisee.

So Jesus is painting a very different picture than how many of us have thought about life, the way many of us interact with God. And he is illustrating this truth we cannot afford to miss. It's maybe the most important thing we'll ever believe: We are saved by grace through faith.

If we don't get that, everything else falls apart. If this is not the foundation, it will crumble. What Jesus is saying—he is not saying this is one of the ways, the preferred way, but you have options. He is saying this is the only way to salvation. It's not about standing up straight in some church and listing off your accomplishments. It's about looking down to the ground and saying, "God, be merciful to me because I am a sinner saved by grace through faith."

I love how; in another part of the Bible, in Ephesians 2, a church leader named Paul describes it. It's beautiful in its clarity. He says it like this: "All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ...

"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

That is good news. You see, what Jesus is saying here, what Paul is saying—I want to say it as clearly as I can. God is not waiting for you to get your act together so that you can finally talk. God is not waiting for you to get perfect so finally you can show up. God is not giving you a bunch of re-dos over and over so you can try harder. God has already provided a way and it's good. It's a gift called grace.

And so what we have here is: Christianity is not a merit system. The whole idea of God keeping a tally mark of good versus bad, that's gone. The scoreboard has been blown up. It has been cleared because of what Jesus did for us. He earned what we could not do. He lived the life we were supposed to live. He died the death we deserved to die, and he gave us the reward only he could earn which is being right with God.

Jesus did not come to the cross so we could slightly modify our behavior. He did not go to the cross so we could become just a little bit better. Jesus did not die so bad people could become good or good people could become better. Jesus died so dead people could come alive, and that is better.

Jesus didn't save us from bad, he saved us from death. We were dead in our hopes, dead in our motivations, and dead in our inspirations. We were dead in our relationships. We were dead from the inside out. We had no hope. But God, so rich in his mercy, sent his Son to die for us and it changes everything. It's not a better life, it's a new life. And everything is different and it's so good.

A merit system, at its' worst, is a crushing burden under which none of us can stand. And grace is liberating. A merit system will convince us that we're pretty good and we have it all together, and grace will remind us that we're not. A merit system will convince us that we have to earn God's love, and grace would tell us we already have it.

See the Pharisee and tax collector—they walked out of that temple two different guys because the lost think they're good. The saved know they're not. God's not asking you to be a good person, he is asking you to be a saved person. And that's better.

So one of the beautiful things about this parable, one of my favorite things, is that no matter whom you resonated with the most with today, the Pharisee or the tax collector, your next step is exactly the same. So maybe you were listening to the Pharisee and were like, "That kind of sounds like me. I've been asking a lot of *how could they* questions. I don't really get why people do what they do, and sometimes I feel better than other people because of the way I live."

If you need evidence of that, look at your relationships. Look at your marriage. How often do you feel the need to correct your spouse because you were right and they were wrong? When was the last time you developed a friendship with someone who did not have it together like you do? What about your parenting? How often do you need to speak into every decision your kid makes because you know so much and they need to hear it?

Maybe you resonate with that. Maybe your ribs are sore because the person you came with just elbowed you really hard. And the beautiful thing Jesus wants you to do today is pray like a tax collector. He wants us to pray this: O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.

You see, the longer I go in my life following Jesus, when I look that truth dead in the eye and I get convinced I'm alright, I'm pretty good, If other people could catch up to me it would probably be better for them, when I start thinking highly of myself I need this reminder on a daily basis that I am not good, I am saved. And that is different. My life is new because of what Jesus did for me.

O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner. My self-righteousness is just as sinful as their drug addiction. My self-righteousness is just as bad as their wayward path. My self-righteousness is just as sinful as their selfishness. O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner. May we be humbled by that, may we be reminded of who we really are.

Or maybe you today, as you were listening to that story, you just knew you were the tax collector. It's a minor miracle you showed up to a place like this today. Maybe you're watching online right now because you couldn't even bring yourself to show up. And you feel the weight, the shame, and the misery. You know what you did, what you said, and who you've become. And Jesus says today that your next step is that same prayer: O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.

And the beauty of that is we have been promised how God will respond. He will respond with love, grace, and a new life. You do not have to get it all together. You do not have to be perfect because the bad guys sometimes win because Jesus gave us a way out. And the gift of grace, it changes everything.

So right now, no matter who you are, no matter where you are at in your life, no matter which person you resonated most with, I want to pray the same prayer for all of us.

Father, O God, be merciful to us for we are all sinners. Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves, convinced that we've got it all right, convinced we are better than other people, convinced we deserve what you've offered here. Humble us, break us, remind us of who we are. Remind us of what you've given us in the gift of grace.

Break our hearts for the people who don't yet know you. Soften our hearts for the people who seem messy. Remind us of what you really saved us from, God. O God, be merciful to us, for we are sinners.

For those of us who are carrying a heavy burden, we're tired and weak and don't know if we can keep going. God, today is the day we throw that burden on you. We throw ourselves upon your mercy, because you are the only one who can handle it. You will give us life, change us from the inside out, and now we can go live a life that is never the same. You're a good, good Father who loves us, always has, and has never bailed on us.

Oh God, be merciful to us, for we are sinners. Thank you for your Son. Thank you for new life. It's in your name I pray. Amen.