

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

**NOW TO BE CONFIDENT ON JUDGMENT DAY | LOVE AND WAR**

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Alright. Well it's really, really good to be with everybody today. I want to welcome everybody gathered across all of our locations and online.

If you have a Bible go ahead and grab it and find 1 John, chapter 4. 1 John, chapter 4 is where we are going to be today.

I don't know if any of you can relate to me, but I have never been a very good test taker. I'm just not very good at taking tests. Or maybe a better way to say it is, I'm not good at being tested.

I remember when I was growing up, in high school and in college, the most stressful week of the year was finals week. I just wasn't very good at taking tests. And the final exam was so much of your overall grade.

This will kind of show you what kind of a student I was. I would kind of run the numbers and figure out the lowest possible grade I could get on the test (some of you can relate, that makes me feel good) in order to pass the class. That's the kind of high bar this academic scholar was setting. What's the lowest possible grade that I could get?

When I took my drivers test for the first time I failed because I ran a red light. That will do it. Right? And the context of that wasn't that I was in a rush, it was that I was at a red light and you can turn left at a green light, let me get this straight. I'm being tested, so the light turns green then you can go.

I was at a red light and the instructor said, "Turn left." He didn't say, "Hey, wait until the light turns green and turn left," so I just turned left. And he goes, "You failed."

Over the last couple of months, after about a 20 year break, I've recently picked up the game of golf again because, apparently, I want some more aggravation and agony in my life. And I've been taking golf lessons, you know. Just trying to figure this all out.

So I got put to the test this past Monday. I played in a charity golf scramble. And the three guys who were in my foursome were really, really good. I am not. And every single tee box felt like a test that I was failing. It was just awful. We'd get up there and they would crush it and it was like, "Oh, man. Great shot. Good lie. Good lie." I don't even know what that means, "Good lie."



And then I'd get up there on the tee box and whip it. And it would just be awkward silence. It just felt like I was failing every single time.

I don't know about you guys, when the pressure is on, I'm just not very good at taking a test or being tested. And this is why I'm going to be very, very honest with you, every time the Bible mentioned something called Judgment Day...

I'm not talking about, has nothing to do with Arnold Schwarzenegger, or the *Terminator* movies but this day that the Scriptures mention where you and I will stand before God and we will give an account for the way in which we lived our lives. That has always made me really, really nervous.

And I think it should make all of us a bit nervous because at very best, that should be sobering. I know what God has called me to and then I know how far short I've actually fallen from that. And the Bible says that we will stand before God one day to give an account of that.

Jesus mentioned that day in Matthew 7. And He said, "Not everybody who stands before God and says Lord, Lord will I acknowledge." And they'll come back (and I'll put this in today's vernacular) they'll come back and say, "Well, Lord, we prayed a prayer. We raised our hand. We filled out a card. We walked an aisle. We listened to K Love. We volunteered in Kids' Ministry, aka pediatric purgatory. We did that for years.

And He's going to say, "Yeah, but I didn't know you." Here what He is saying. We can do a lot of things for Him, and believe all of the right things, and check the boxes, but what He is after is a relationship.

Now, we've been in this series in 1 John and one of the characteristics of John's writing both in his gospel, which is found earlier in the New Testament, and then in his epistles, which are found later, is that John has a tendency to write... One of the characteristics is he uses words of sharp contrast in order to make his point.

His favorite was light and darkness. He also writes about things like sin and holiness and grace and truth and the justice of God and the mercy of God. And most of the time we are all about the extremes, but John holds things in tension.

Now, John writes (and we've seen this if you've been joining us for this series that we've been in in 1 John) to give us assurance and conviction at the same time. So a conviction that brings about this life change, this tension between the two. John wants to reassure us and he wants to convict us of sin.

So, In chapter 4, John is going to mention Judgment Day. We're going to see it in the passage here in just a minute. Here's what John does. John wants us to be confident on the day of judgment. In other words, Judgment Day does not have to mean dooms day.

We can stand before God with confidence. Confidence in what? Not because of anything that I've done, not because I've been able to achieve or obtain a certain status with God. I said this a few weeks ago, salvation is a standing that we have before God, not an achievement.

And so John, in our passage today, is going to give us four what I call assurances of how to be confident on Judgment Day. So if you're taking notes... I just want to encourage you to have a pen ready. Jot a couple of things down. That's mostly just for you so you can kind of go back through and review it for assurances.

So we're going to pick up in our passage today starting off in verse 1 of chapter 4. He says, "Dear friends." He's actually going to say that over and over again in this passage because he knows what he is writing is convicting. He says:

*"Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit." Notice that Spirit is capitalized. "You must test them to see if the spirit" now notice there that there it's lower case, "they have comes from God."*

*And then he says this sentence that can be a bit concerning, but we all know it's true.*

*"...there are many false prophets in the world." 1 John 4:1 (NLT)*

So what was going on then (it's always important to know what was happening then before we apply it accurately to today). What was happening then was there were these false prophets rising up within the church teaching things that were not consistent with the faith. And John wants them to be aware of it.

Now, that's still going on today. And there is so much content—in fact, we have more access to content. I'm not just talking about sermons, but pod casts, and audio books, and influencers. There is all of this content that is constantly coming at us.

And discipleship is where we are formed into the content we consume. There is no such thing as passive receiving content. Whatever it is that we are consuming, listening to, receiving, that is forming us—the word there is *formation*—it's forming us into something or someone. And John says we've got to be really conscientious about that. We've got to be discerning of that. And I know that it used to be the only sermon you listened to was that you got into a car, drove to a physical church building, and listened to somebody deliver a sermon.



Now we've got access to all kinds of preaching. And not only do we have to be discerning about real life communicators, now we've got AI to deal with and Chat GPT.

My communications team came to me a few weeks ago to say, "We just want you to be aware of the fact that we are already putting into place what we might do if somebody puts together a digital version of you from AI, making you say things that you never said." And I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" That just blows my mind.

So, we've got to be super discerning. That's the primary point that John is making in this passage. Now there's another thing that he is saying. And I want to draw your attention back to the fact that the first time he used the word *Spirit* he capitalizes it and the second time he doesn't.

So the first time he is referring to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit that is within us. So he says, "When you are listening to somebody teach," the same would be true for our lives as well if you are a follower of Jesus, it's not just the truth that they say... Then he says this, "Pay attention to the life that they live." That's the lower case s. That's the spirit by which they carry themselves.

This is what Paul mentions to the Galatians—the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. It's simply this, "Does the way I live my life align to the truth that I believe?"

It's the idea that... I just have to tell you guys, I know how heavy of a task I have on a weekly basis of just what I might call rightly handling the Word of God. And know that I don't want to ever, ever pretend to stand on this stage acting like I've got it all together. I want to be consistent—I want to be the same person off the platform that I am on.

And this is what John is urging all of us toward—this consistency, this authenticity in the way that we live our lives. He's going to get more specific in verse 2. He says:

*"This is how we know..."*

*How do we know if we're following after God? How do we know if they have the upper case S Spirit of God? He starts here and then he's going to move on from it. He starts with:*

*"If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body," the fancy word for that is incarnation, God came to us, "that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist..."*



*I don't have time to fully unpack the theology around all of this, just notice that it's capitalized, he's talking about a singular figure that rises up in the end days, anti-Christ, that's exactly what that means.*

*Earlier in John's writing he actually says, "Lower case a antichrists in the plural. So there are antichrists. There is also an Antichrist. Many are against Jesus. Just like there is a capital S Holy Spirit and there are spirits, the spirit by which we carry ourselves. He says:*

*"...which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here." 1 John 4:2-3 (NLT)*

So the first place that John begins is he says, "If you're listening to a teaching, how do you know somebody is a false prophet?" It's like, "Do they deny the divinity of Jesus?" So let me turn this. Assurance number one, for those of us who have confidence on the day of judgment is:

### **You acknowledge Jesus as God.**

He isn't just another moral teacher. He's not just another good guy, teaching us or encouraging us to be a better version of ourselves. But Jesus is God wrapped up in human flesh who came to live the life that you and I could never live and He died the death that we deserved to die and He shed His blood on a cross as payment for our sins.

He died. And then He was bodily resurrected and He ascended into heaven and now He is mediating on our behalf before God the Father. That is who He is.

So John just says, "We're going to start..." It's like Gene Hackman in *Hoosiers*. "This is the basics." Like, "This is a ball." He goes, "This is where we begin, acknowledging that Jesus is God."

Now, there are what we might call these categories that we might call essentials and non-essentials. Or primary and secondary issues. Paul goes to great lengths when he is writing to the Corinthians about secondary issues. In other words, matters of opinion, matters of conscience.

As Christ followers we have freedom in Christ. So what are some examples of that? Should a Christian drink alcohol or not? That's a secondary matter. It's a matter of opinion. Should we celebrate certain holidays? Matters of conscience. Those are not salvation dependent.

But then there are some that are salvation dependent. You would call them essential to the faith. And at the top of the list would be the divinity of Jesus. So he says, “Do you acknowledge that Jesus is God?”

Now, here’s why this is so important. Whenever you begin to come across somebody who maybe has deconstructed his faith... And by the way, in August we’re going to do a series on deconstruction and reconstruction. We’re just going to take a look at some of the biggest topics that may be why people walked away from the faith.

But whenever you begin to look at somebody who has moved away from God or here’s the word, it is a *trajectory hermeneutic*, like a trajectory away from God, it almost always begins in a change of view in the personhood of Christ, who Jesus is.

John writes and goes on in verse 4. He says:

*“But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.”*

*That’s one of the greatest verses, I think, not only in 1 John but in all of the New Testament, “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” And if you’ve got the Holy Spirit, that is greater than. And then he says in verse 5:*

*“Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world’s viewpoint, and the world listens to them. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us.”*

*Now he gets right at it in this last sentence”*

*“That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.” 1 John 4:4-6 (NLT)*

So assurance number one is that we acknowledge Jesus as God. Here’s assurance two:

### **The Spirit of truth overrides the spirit of deception.**

The Spirit of truth overrides the spirit of deception in our lives. Every single one of us needs to recognize who or what we are listening to. So if you are a follower, or even if you are not a follower of Jesus, here’s what happens. It’s like a pre-conversion.

There is no way you come to know God without the Holy Spirit in your life. It is that still, small voice. It is that conviction. I have never preached a sermon that led anybody to Jesus. The Holy Spirit has used words I've prepared to lead people to Jesus.

If you've ever felt like you are getting uncomfortable, there is kind of a wrestling match, internal kind of feeling that quite possibly may be... The Holy Spirit is always speaking. The Holy Spirit is always speaking the truth.

So here's what John is saying, "Is the volume of the Holy Spirit's voice turned up enough to where you can hear it, or is it turned down and you're listening to the spirit of deception?"

Right now all of those things are happening in the world in which we live. The Holy Spirit—here's what the Bible says—speaks truth. Satan is the father of lies. The Holy Spirit reveals reality to us. Satan is the ninja of deception. He's really, really good at deceiving.

The Holy Spirit brings conviction into our lives, which is uncomfortable but it's a good thing. It's for our good. Satan accuses. He's an accuser. How do you know the difference between the two? One leads to repentance, a realignment with God and who you were made to be, and one just shames you to death. One just says, "You haven't done bad things, you are bad." That's the voice of an accuser. No hope. It is absolutely hopeless.

Now, here's the thing. We've got both of these voices going on in the world and you can't be passive. You'll listen to one over the other. The question is: who or what am I listening to?

Here's what I want you to at least crack the door open on. And I want to say this as pastorally and as empathetically as I can because I hear this all of the time, not just as a pastor but as a human being. I hear this all of the time. We live in a world of pain, in a world of brokenness. Nobody is immune from it. Have you noticed that oftentimes?

I think that God allows us to wrestle with Him, just read the life of Job. God can handle it. It's okay. He can handle your questions. He can handle you being real.

One of the observations I've seen is that oftentimes when life begins to fall apart and there is pain and suffering... Have you noticed how quickly we ask God, "Where are you?" and how strangely Satan seems to be absent from the conversation? He is the father of lies. He is deceiving. He is a roaring lion, as the Bible says. What makes us think that we are not going to get scratched a little? He's gunning for us. There is a target on your back.





And the question is: Whose voice am I listening to in this world, the voice of the deceiver or the voice of the Holy Spirit? John is simply saying this, “Do you recognize the Holy Spirit’s voice when He speaks?”

It’s kind of like the more time you spend with Him, the more that you recognize it. It’s kind of like... There is a distinct difference between the way I talk on the phone with my wife or let’s say a customer service representative. There’s just a difference. Right? There is a different sense of familiarity.

So if I call customer service representatives, they don’t know me at all. They’ve never heard my voice. So what are they doing? They’re trying to authenticate my identity. So they say, “Can you tell me your address? Can you tell me your middle name? Give me the last four digits of your Social.” They are trying to authenticate these very things.

When I call my wife, she’s never once said, “Hey, can you verify the last four digits of your Social?” No, when I call my wife, I usually will say, “Hey, it’s me.” And she’s not like, “Who?” because we’ve spent a lot of time together.

This is kind of the idea that John is driving at. Have you spent enough time with the Holy Spirit so that you recognize His voice and when you hear something that is a lie, like it fires off like a red flag, you’re like, “I know that that is not true. I know that that is false.”

Verse 7, John goes on and he says it again:

*“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another...”*

*Why? Because that’s just a nice thing to do? No. He gives a reason.*

*“...for love comes from God.”*

*Love is God’s thing. God is the author of it.*

*“Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8 (NLT)*

So here’s assurance number three. Assurance number three is:

**You reflect the kind of love God has shown you to others.**

You reflect the kind of love that God has shown you to other people. Now, right here is one of the only times that God is identified with one of His attributes. And notice it doesn’t say, “God is loving.” It says God actually is love. He’s not saying the emotion of



love is always God or that love is God's only attribute, but that love is actually to the core of His being.

Theologians point out that this is possible because God is a Trinity, which means that He is one being existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So He has always existed in relationship with another, which is one of those things that if you think about it too long, your head explodes. But this is the nature of God.

Well, what kind of love? Well the love of God is a self-giving, self-sacrificing kind of love. And here's John's point. He's saying that for those of us who are following after Jesus, that kind of love should be in us in the way that we treat other people. And if it's not, then there is no way that God is in us.

I had a mentor say this to me years ago. He said, "Don't you think that if we are saved by grace that ought to make us gracious?"

Once again there is like this tension around that. How gracious should we be? When does grace cross the line into license? And then what about this over here? Does this mean that we should never keep people accountable?

Once again, John deals with tension. And what is transformational is in the tension. So John's going to go on to describe God's love, because the world wants to define love in a bunch of different ways.

John's going to define God's love. And he's going to say that it is more than just a feeling, it's more than just a sentiment, but it's something that gets translated into an action. And actually that action is what saves us, it is an action defined by grace. So he says this in verse 9:

*"God showed..." He didn't just tell, he showed, "how much he loved us..." how? "by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." 1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)*

So John says, "One of the defining characteristics of God's love, the defining quality of His love is the grace that He showed us through Jesus."

So in a world that would say, "Well, it's unloving to confront anyone, John says, "No. Actually God's love confronted the offense of our sin." That's real love. But he confronted it by sending His Son as a sacrifice. Here's how Romans 5:8 puts it, "...while we were still sinners."

I love that passage because in Romans 5:8 (go back and read it for yourself later today) Paul just kind of unpacks this and he says, “Listen, this is the kind of love that God has for us. He didn’t sit back and wait for us to feel sorry for our sins and then He forgave us, He made it possible for us to be forgiven without any guarantee that we would turn to Him.”

That’s pretty mind blowing. I don’t know about you; nobody operates that way. I will do a service for you once the funds are in my bank account kind of a thing. God sent His Son first. And this is how Paul puts it in Romans 5. He says, “Very rarely will somebody die for a good person.”

This is the idea that if I had lay my life down for somebody, that circle is very, very small. So If I was put into a position where I needed... If I laid my life down so other people would live, that circle is extremely small. I’m talking like, I don’t know if any of you in this room would be in it. And I say that lovingly. You all are on your own.

But who would be in that circle? Without even thinking about it, my wife, and my kids. I don’t even have to think about it. For them, I would lay my life down.

Now the next layer, and he says it in Romans 5:8, for an exceptionally good person somebody might consider laying their life down. So I broaden that circle out a little bit and go, “Well, outside of my wife and kids, who am I willing to lay my life down for?”

And you would have to be a saint. We’re talking like, you’d have to be the one who is going to cure cancer or improve my golf game or something. It would be like the circle... You’d have to be worthy of it for me to lay my life down.

Here’s what God did—while we were still in the midst of the darkest days of our rebellion and sin, God sent Jesus. He goes, “That’s how much God loves you.” It’s this idea that He would lay down His very life so that you would have a shot at reconciliation with Him.

The Creator God, after having been rejected by His creation, could have destroyed us, and started all over. But He chose, out of compassion, to take on the penalty of our sin and suffer in our place. A King dying for unrepentant traitors. A Creator dying for His creation. A betrayed Lover offering Himself as a sacrifice for the betrayer. Would any of us have done that?

God wasn’t obligated to do it. He didn’t have to do it. He wanted to do it. John says that is the love of God. It is a self-sacrificing, lay My life down kind of love.

And then he says in verse 11:

*“Dear friends,”*

*I just love the fact that he keeps saying this, because he knows that what he is saying is kind of hard to hear. He’s like, “Dear friends.” “Dear friends.”*

*“Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.”*

*Now, notice he doesn’t identify each other. He doesn’t say, “We surely ought to love our family,” or, “We surely ought to love those people.” He says each other, which means anyone and everyone, everybody you lock eyes with. And then he says this in verse 12:*

*“No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.” 1 John 4:11-12 (NLT)*

That is just a fancy way of saying, “Even though nobody has ever seen God, people can see God in us by the way that we live our lives.” Right now that should be an urgent, red alert, alarm for the church in this generation to hear because we live in such a day of confusion and pain and hypocrisy.

And people who have actually heard the gospel have never really seen it lived out because many who are following after Jesus are not necessarily living what they say they believe. Or we say we believe in God but we are not very loving toward others. And there is this dissonance between the two that is off putting. John says, “May God’s love come about in this full expression.”

Here’s what that looks like. That there would be people who are really, really far from God, they don’t believe what the Bible teaches, their values are about as different and as opposed to Christ likeness as you can get, and yet they meet you, they live next door to you, they work with you, they talk with you, they serve you coffee and they say to you, “I don’t know that I believe what you believe, but there is something so fundamentally different in you. What is that?”

That’s what we should be aspiring to. It’s this idea that Jesus has left us here as representatives and ambassadors and that’s hard. We’re going to have to live in tension. We live in tension with a world that hates God and yet we are to lovingly engage with the world that hates the One we follow.

So where do you draw the line and when do you speak up and when do you sit down. Once again, John is not going to solve this for us he just says there is this tension that exists.

I’m keenly aware of this tension as I see... As one of the pastors, a temporary pastor, by the way, I will be here for just a certain number of years. I’m serving right now in this



generation. And as I try to steward the mission of this church there is a tension between how much effort we make in reaching people and how much effort we make in growing people? It's evangelism and discipleship. It's growing wide and growing deep. There seems to be a conflict, but there doesn't have to be.

I need you to know, right now, the longer you follow after Jesus or maybe the way that you're wired up personality wise, probably one of those, when I say evangelism and discipleship, there's probably one of those you drift toward.

And here's the thing. The closer you are to the day of your conversion, you're probably really passionate about evangelism, especially if you didn't grow up in the church.

You came to know Christ as an adult, later on, and it's just one of those things that is like you received the gift of God's grace, you knew what you were rescued from, and you want all of your friends and family and co-workers to experience that same thing. You're all about evangelism. We've got to do whatever we can to reach people far from God.

But then the longer that we follow after God, maybe the more we start to forget how amazing grace really is. And maybe we begin to kind of say, "Well, it's about discipleship."

Here's the thing. Those two should never be pitted against each other. The best evangelistic effort is discipleship. Disciple efforts lead to evangelism. We should be growing wide. Why? Because there are so many people who are hurting and hopeless who need to meet Jesus. But we should also be growing deep because we need to grow a deep-seated root system because we live in a really, really challenging, painful, complicated world.

I love what it says in the book of Jude. It says, "Snatch others from the fire," which tells me that we need to be close enough to the flames that we smell a little like smoke.

I want you to know what kind of a church you're sitting in right now. We want to manage those two tensions. We want to do anything and everything possible so that we can reach people who are far from God. And we want to remove anything that would be unnecessary to them coming to know Jesus.

So, I do not wear a costume when I preach. I just wear what I wear on Monday. Why? Because I just want to be a human being relating to another human being. I try to talk normally I try not to have a preacher voice where I'm just praying. I'm trying not to do any of that.



I'm just trying to actually talk the way I normally talk. Why? To not over complicate this thing. I'm trying to take my cues after a Savior who wrapped Himself in human flesh and walked among us and looked people in the eyes.

So, as a church we're going to try to manage those two tensions.

I had somebody reach out to me a couple of weeks ago and I had a really, really good conversation with him. His heart was in the right place. But we were talking about this very thing. One of the things that he said, he said, "You know, it just kind of seems like all we ever talk about is reaching people far from God. We need to emphasize the reverence of God and we need to emphasize faithfulness."

And I don't disagree. I think, once again, all of those things are in tension. But I just told him, "Yeah. But we need to do whatever we can to reach people who are apart from Christ so that they can come to a saving faith." And he said, "I understand all of that. I hear that." And then he just said this. He goes, "You know... I don't know. I just feel like I'm kind of burned out on the message of grace."

I go, "Wow." I understand where we are in that but, man, may we never lose the wonder of it. May we never lose the wonder of grace. I don't care how long you've been following after Jesus; we need it every single day. It's like the air that we breathe.

And right now I think it's pretty safe to say that Christianity is really misrepresented in the world. And oftentimes, as Christians, we've given the world the wrong impression because of the way in which we live, the lack of love, the lack of grace, the lack of alignment. So I think the only answer to that is to once again stand in the presence of Jesus and be awed by that, be changed by that once again.

Well, John goes on in verse 13 and he says:

*"And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us."* 1 John 4:13 (NLT)

How can we know that God's Spirit lives in us? Well, this is exactly what Jesus was driving at in Matthew, chapter 7. He says that it is all about proximity, it's all about relationships. He says in verse 15:

*"All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God."* 1 John 4:15 (NLT)

And then in verse 16 he goes:

*"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect."*

*That's the process of sanctification.*

*"So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment,"*

*That's the verse that this sermon title came from, by the way. We don't have to be afraid on the day of judgment, Judgment Day does not need to be dooms day,*

*"...but we can face him with confidence,"*

*How often whenever you hear that or think about Judgment Day do you hear the word confidence in that sentence? On Judgment Day, we can stand before God with confidence. How? And he sums it all up with these last few words:*

*"...because we live like Jesus here in this world." 1 John 4:16-17 (NLT)*

So here's assurance number four:

### **God's love drives out fear.**

God's love drives out our fear and now we are living like Jesus. How do we do that? Because we have the Holy Spirit living within us. And we don't have to be afraid on Judgment Day. Our confidence is directly connected to how we live and interact with others in this world each day.

So here's the question. How did Jesus live in this world? In the tension. Jesus' whole life was tension, starting with He was God confined to a human body. Talk about tension. He was tempted in every way that you and I are and yet He never sinned. Talk about tension.

Jesus, one time, was accused by the religious elite, get this, as being a glutton and a drunkard, which to me means that He enjoyed good food and drink. They also accused Him of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners, which meant that He hung out with really, really unrighteous people. But He brought about transformation in their lives. And the only way to bring about transformation in this world is proximity.

So there was a professor from Yale in the 1940s, a guy by the name of Richard Neber, who gave a series of talks about how Christians have historically lived in the world and engaged in culture. He gave five views. And I just want to wrap up with these five views.



Here's what he is doing. He's simply making observations. He's describing these views, he's not necessarily prescribing any one of them, although I'm going to prescribe one at the very end. Alright? You'll probably be able to guess which one.

He says, "Here's how Christians throughout history have engaged in the culture in which we live." One would just be:

### **Christ above culture**

This is the idea that we're just going to live our lives thinking the values that we have as Christians are superior to the values of the world. So let's create a new sub-culture within culture. This is when we turn the word Christian into an adjective. So we have Christian music and Christian breathiness. It's like holy huddle. We separate ourselves from the culture. Christ above culture.

Another observation he made was:

### **Christ of culture**

This is the idea that we just sort of blend in and there is really no distinguishable difference. We just kind of affirm everything in the culture. It's almost like a pantheistic view. So this view would be like, "Hey, there are no restraints. Just enjoy everything that the culture has to offer without hesitation. Obviously you should be able to see some of the potential pitfalls in that one.

The third would be:

### **Christ against culture**

Similar to Christ above culture, but instead of pulling away, Christ against culture runs in with picket signs and protests declaring a cultural war. And it very rarely brings about the kind of transformation that sticks.

Here's number four:

### **Christ and culture in paradox**

This is the idea of we're sort of operating as dual citizenship. Like we are citizens of heaven but we are also citizens of this world. We act like a Christian on Sunday, but not during the week. We're sort of straddling the fence. As the tee shirt puts it, "I love Jesus but I cuss a little." It's that whole idea of, "I'm just kind of like a chameleon. I'll change by my surroundings."



And then here's the fifth view:

### **Christ transforming culture**

And that would be the one that I would advocate for, the one that I desire, the one that I want our church to be. Where Jesus stepped into this world, He didn't pull away. He didn't acclimate. He came into this world to rescue us, to set His love and affection upon us. To change us and to transform us.

You've heard me say this before. Jesus loves you right where you are. If you are a tax collector up in a tree, or a woman at a well so far from Him. He will pursue you and run after you. He loves you so much He'll never leave you as you are.

The word is *transformation*. He brings about a transformation within. And in order for that to happen, He's got to get close. Now, as Christ followers, that same Spirit should be in us. And now He sends us out, it's a wild thought, to be His representatives in the world.

Jesus would say to the disciples, "I'm getting ready to leave. I'm going back to the Father." They didn't want Him to go. He said, "Don't worry. I'm sending my Holy Spirit to be with you. Greater is He that is in you than for Me to be with you." And we have that same Holy Spirit as well.

Does that mean that we still struggle? Absolutely it means that we will struggle. Here's the difference. We're honest about it.

Does it mean that you still have questions of God? Yes. But it means that you can be open about that. You can drop the mask and be authentic.

And right now, more than ever, there is a world that needs to not only hear the reinforcement of the truth of the gospel, they need to see people who are actually believe it and actually get in close proximity with Jesus to be transformed so that the world looks at them and goes, "I don't know if I believe what you believe but there is something so distinctly so different in you. What is it?"

That is what brings about transformation in our lives, so we can stand on the day of judgment and look our Heavenly Father in the eye with confidence because of how we lived.

Father, we come to You right now and we long to hear the words, "Well, done. Well done good and faithful servant." But I know that there are going to be a lot of people who can relate to me when I say this, I feel like the longer I live, the more it feels like I'm in the movie *The Hunger Games* where people get kicked off left and right. How can we



remain faithful to the end? We know that that comes in proximity to You. Another way in which that happens is through worship.

So, God, right now, for those who are listening to my voice, who would call themselves a Christian, would call themselves Christ followers, I just pray right now that by Your Spirit You would bring to mind anything that they need to bring into realignment with Your Spirit.

The word for that is just *repentance*. By Your grace You give us the opportunity to do that on a regular basis. Just call to mind, “Hey, here’s something that needs to be brought into realignment,” so that we can live authentic lives for this watching world.

God, if there are some here today who have never heard any of this explained this way, maybe they just thought that this was morality or religion or just check the boxes, but they never really knew that it was a relationship with Jesus, I pray to day that they are sensing that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit just slightly making them uncomfortable, that they would respond, that they would surrender their life right where they are, right where they are seated.

That they would just declare that You are Lord and Savior. That they would ask for forgiveness of sin, confess that to You, that they know that You promised forgiveness and Your Spirit would then change them. The word is *conversion*, new eyes to see.

God, thank You for that grace. May we never get burned out on it because we need it. We ask this in Jesus’ name. And everybody says: Amen.

