

City on a Hill: Loved For a Reason

Aaron Brockett | Matthew 5:13-16

Good morning! It's good to see you today and I want to welcome you, especially if this is your first or second time to be with us. If you have a Bible would you please get to Matthew 5? It's the very first book in the New Testament. Matthew 5 is where we're going to be today. This is kind of a the theme passage of the series that we're in. We started the series last week. It's called *City on a Hill* and basically what we are doing is we're spending four weeks kind of centered around this question: What is the Gospel? Who is it for and maybe if we were to kind of extend that question on out we'd say "Why does it matter?".

What is the Gospel? Who is it for and why does it matter? Now as human beings we have a tendency to change or to confuse what the Gospel message really is. Maybe the most common adaptation of this is that we morph it into kind of a "good works" mentality and we basically say, "In order for God to find me lovable, in order for God to find me acceptable then I need to stop doing bad things, which I'm never going to be able to completely eliminate so let me just try to reduce the bad things and let me try to increase the good things that I do in my life. The goal is to keep the good things just slightly above the bad things and then one day God will love me and accept me, but I can't know for sure. I'll find out when I die."

That sounds like a lot of fun - right? So people, kind of, end up living this out. This is what we might call empty or false religion and usually this "dead ends" with frustration, anger, bitterness, or burn out and I don't blame them. I mean who wants to do that? Who wants to take a test that you're already set up to fail? Who wants to, kind of, interact with God, as if he is the Great Cosmic Referee in the sky with a whistle in his mouth always looking over your shoulder ready to call a penalty. That is not the Gospel message, as human beings we change it to that.

We also have a tendency to change or confuse it in such a way that if we ever do come to understand the fullness of the Gospel message that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus' works and not our own we have a tendency then to get possessive about that. So we say, "Well this is, kind of, a - this is true for me, this is a message for me, but not necessarily for them." So we divide people into categories. So we say, "Well, there's the "us" and there's the "them" and they are out and we are in." Well, how do you know if they're out? "Well I don't know they just, kind of, look like they're out."

We say this as an example from Luke 7 last week. Where Jesus is having a meal in a Pharisee's house, for all practical purposes, these are a group of individuals that would say, "Hey, man we're in." Then a woman of the city kind of crashes the party, for all practical purposes, she would be considered out. She walks in and as she walks in to this house, maybe, the word that would be best used to describe her would be the word "desperate". She's **desperate** for hope, she's **desperate** for love, and she's **desperate** for acceptance and forgiveness. But that's not necessarily the word that the Pharisee's see as they look at her. If there was a tag hanging from her sleeve it would most likely read "damaged goods".

She's hopeless, she's untouchable, and she's unforgiveable. If Jesus knew what kind of a woman, who this is, who's touching Him then He would not let her anywhere near Him. So she walks in and she walks

around the table to Jesus' feet. She can feel the accusatory stares and the judgmental whispers that basically communicate this **horrible** message, "You are not welcome here".

When that mentality creeps into a church and it inevitably will, when that attitude creeps into the church, it grieves the heart of Jesus. His Holy Spirit will pack up His bags and leave. Some of you know what it's like to walk into a room and to have all eyes on you and maybe not for the best of reasons.

When I was in middle school, one of my good friends went through puberty a lot faster than the rest of us. When he ended up in the eighth grade he was already over 6 feet tall and was shaving and because of this he had the coordination of a new born baby giraffe. The church that we went to was about 1500 people or so and so the worship center was pretty full one Sunday. The church we grew up in had seats called "pews".

Now how many of you grew up in a church background remember the **pews**? A fair number of you do! What a wonderful name for a seat! I don't know who came up with that, but it had to have been a lost bet, or a joke or something. It is like, "What do we call the seat where people park their backsides. Let's call it a **pew**" because that sounds real enticing. So anyway, "pews", if you don't have experience with these wonderful contraptions, basically they, kind of, operate like squeeze chutes at a cattle ranch. So they're pretty tight together, closely together and here's the deal about the pew is that you would sit down sort of on the end because nobody wants to get caught in the middle. You would sit on the end, but then inevitably if you got there early, people would walk up and they would want to sit on the bench seat with you, so instead of them climbing over you, you would just scoot down. Where here's the thing as you scoot down, people are filling in from the other side and before you know it you're locked into that baby and you're not getting out of there until the service ends or somebody flees, you're locked in.

So me and my friend are on the second **peeeew**, that's how you have to say it, we're in the second pew in the front of the church service packed out service middle of sermon my friend leans over to me and says "I've got to go to the bathroom." I'm like, "Man, good luck getting your new born baby giraffe of a body out of this pew and into the restroom." But he decides to go forward, he stands up and everybody notices him because he's right down the middle and he's trying to climb over everybody, stepping on their toes, putting his hands in their face and he gets down to the very edge of the aisle, his left foot gets caught up in the strap of the lady's purse and he trips.

He fell face first right out into the middle of the aisle and there was a collective gasp in the room and all eyes were on him, the preacher stopped preaching the sermon. The guy is just lying there. Now here's the thing we knew he didn't knock himself out cold, it looked like it, but you knew he was still conscious because he was still moving, but he was not getting up. He was just, kind of, like – kind of, this. Now I need to mention to you that the church I grew up in had this really thick, sort of, orange shag carpet and he had braces. I don't even need to finish the story.

So anyway, you know what happened, he's face down, braces stuck in the carpet, middle of the service, he can't get up. This is a true story; I'm not making it up. He's trying to get up, we get down and we're like, "Dude, you gotta get up!" He's like, "I can't my braces are stuck in the carpet." So he ends up forcing his head up, but not without taking a big clump of the orange carpet with him in his teeth, runs out of the service petrified. He's still known in our home church about that whole encounter and all that went down. Every eye was on him.

You know you don't have to have a fallen in church, get your braces stuck in the carpet to know, maybe, what it feels like to, kind of, walk into a place like this and, kind of, feel like all eyes are on you and maybe it's just your own perception. Maybe you came here today and you haven't been in church for a long time or maybe somebody coerced you into coming and you walk in and you're just, kind of, like, "You know I just don't feel like I fit here. I don't know that I'm wearing the right thing. I don't know that I believe what all these other people believe. I don't know that this Bible can be trusted. I don't even know that there really is a God. I've been let down by churches before, what's the difference with this? Why are you people so excited about these songs? I just don't necessarily get it. So you think to yourself that, "If everyone around me could really know what was in my heart and in my mind and if they knew what I did with my body last night, then most certainly they would look at me with the accusatory stare with the judgmental whisper that says, you are not welcome here."

We went out of our way last week to say that God is not confined by our circumstance. That there isn't a type of person that Jesus extends his love and grace to. Jesus doesn't stand in front of you with a clipboard, kind of, going down and marking off, making sure all of your paperwork is in line before He is able to love and save. We quoted the prophet Isaiah last week from Isaiah 59 that says that, "God's ears are able to hear you as you communicate to Him as you cry out to Him and that his arms are long enough to reach you." The way that we put this last week is we said that, "God does not have T-Rex arms." Remember that? I, kind of, made an idiot of myself up here and I noticed that last Sunday afternoon that the most tweeted line from my sermon was "God does not have T-Rex arms". Somebody put a video together that's a loop of me just walking around doing this. Now, I worked hard on last Sunday's sermon, there was a lot of good, tweetable content in it, that's what you chose to tweet. It's just an observation, I'm not bitter, it's just an observation.

If we were to try to break down the Gospel message we would say, "We need to, kind of, keep each of these things in balance that we need to recognize that God receives us as we are. He receives you as you are. He accepts you as you are. Now a lot of times we, kind of, want to stop right there. Well God receives me as I am. God accepts me as I am. So I'm loved, I've got infinite value, I can just do what I want and just be on my merry way, but that's not the fullness of the Gospel message. The Gospel message is that He refuses to leave you **as you are**. See the Gospel isn't a billy club that we beat people with and it isn't a blankie that we comfort and coddle them with because neither is transformational, and neither is what Jesus came to offer. The Gospel message is in essence in a narrative found in Luke 7 - that this woman of the city walks in and Jesus is straight up with her, He doesn't sugar coat it, He doesn't conceal what it or conceal the truth, He looks at her and He says, "Your sins are many, but you are loved."

Guys, that's the fullness of the Gospel message. That you and I, we are sinners, our sins are many, but you are loved and that love should change everything about you. Paul communicates this so well in the book of Romans 3:22 "...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is available for all who believe. For there is no distinction..." In other words we could say that there are no categories. There is no "us" and "them" "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift..." Grace is a gift. It is not something you work for. It's not something that you earn. Thus obliterating this whole, "Well I'll just be good enough thing". It's a gift that you have to receive in faith, "...through the **redemption...**" - we talked about that word last week - "...that is in Christ Jesus who God put forward as **propitiation** - that word just simply means "payment" - by His blood to be received by faith."

The message of the Gospel is that **all have sinned** and we are **all** in the same boat. We're **all** in the same category, but Jesus in his infinite grace rescues us up out of it and He changes us into a different person. Just imagine the kind of impact that we would have as a church if we could just begin to live a fraction of this out. See, we live in a culture right now where we're really split on this whole thing where we are afraid to call anything as sin for fear of being labeled intolerant or hateful and so we've got a whole segment of Christ followers who just kind of choose to go dark. We don't really say anything, we're not salt, we're not light, we just, kind of, fly below the radar, and we don't want to rock the boat. Then what ends up happening – all we're doing is we're handing a microphone to those who, in the name of Christianity, get belligerent and loud and obnoxious.

So they wear their sandwich board signs and their megaphones and they get the websites and so all the culture hears is that side of it, because the genuine Christ followers in an effort – we're not communicating the Gospel, we've stayed silent on this. But here's the deal, the Gospel message is **lost** on our culture right now, because of the silence and because of the screaming.

What God is asking is that we would be a "*City on a Hill*", the fullness of the Gospel, both grace and truth so you might ask the question, "Okay, well, what should our position be? If we're not silent and if we're not screaming what should we do?" Here's our goal as a church - here's what we're trying to accomplish, that our Christ following position would be that we would love and serve the world, in the name of Jesus, even if we disagree them and I might even change this to be a little bit stronger - **especially** if we disagree with them. ...That we would love and serve them in the name of Jesus, especially if we disagree with them.

Now just imagine with me what kind of an impact that would make. On a very practical level what this would mean, is that while we may certainly think that last Sunday during the half-time show of the Super Bowl, that Beyonce should have worn pants, we still remember to love her. We still remember to be compassionate towards her and to pray that she would come to know the love of Jesus. We don't "throw the baby out with the bathwater" there.

What this means is that your next door neighbor who does not believe in God, does not believe the Bible is God's Word, who disagrees with you on just about everything. If you were to listen in on their conversation with their friends describing you, what would they say? Would they say, "Yeah, we live next door to these crazy Christians, we don't agree on anything and they are judgmental and nasty and hateful." Or would they say, "Yeah, we next door to these Christians and we do not know what to do with them because we disagree on everything, we don't believe the same way on just about anything, but they love us. They are respectful of us and they always remember our names and they even come over and give us cookies. The cookies are awful, but they still give us cookies. Like one day, I looked out the window; they were outside, in my driveway, shoveling the stinking snow out of my driveway. I opened up the door and I said, 'What are you doing?' They waved at me with that big goofy smile and they said, 'We're shoveling the stinking snow out of your driveway, because we're the church. That's how we roll.'"

Listen, the Bride of Christ, which **is** the church, is to be the tangible wisdom of God. That is God's Word. It's relevant; it's true to us today, so the tangible wisdom of God and the tangible compassion of God. Those things mixed together becoming visible to the world around us and some people will get it and some people will not and some people will respond to it and some people simply won't, but you know what, it's not our call. We're just called to represent Jesus as salt and light to be the "*City on a Hill*".

Paul says this so well to the Galatian church, as he's casting this vision – in fact a little side bar here - as you read through the Epistles in the New Testament, which are letters that a preacher named Paul writes to congregations much like ours, he's always casting vision. He's always putting this out front in center. He says to the Galatian church in Galatians 3:27 "...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have..." I love this phrase. "...put on Christ." You put Him on. It's like, clothing, you represent Him. "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

This is essentially what we're saying. That we are each saved as individuals, but we are not saved to just to keep it to ourselves. We are saved as individuals that Jesus then creates into a new people; A new community. Most of our Christianity, most of our faith today in the Western world, at least, is highly individualistic. It's something that we try to keep very, very private. "Just my beliefs between me and God." That is not Biblical faith. We're saved as individuals, but then Jesus creates a new community. In 1 Peter 2:9 it says it this way, it says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a Holy nation, a people for His own possession..." There's nothing singular about any of those phrases. "...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Essentially what this is saying is that there are not degrees of sin. There's not major sin and minor sin, there's just sin. This is why James says to us in James 2:10, "...that if you just break a little bit of the law, you are guilty of breaking all of it." Well, that doesn't sound fair. It's not fair - the point is that he's amplifying this message. That sin is sin. Now there are different consequences to sin certainly, but there's not major sin that puts you outside of the reach of God and minor sin that God is just, kind of, okay with all sin is sin. It knocks you out of alignment with God and it hurls you into darkness.

We are then delivered through the marvelous light of Jesus Christ. What Jesus does with the Gospel is that He obliterates the categories. The Pharisee isn't any better than the woman of the city. The woman of the city isn't any more privileged than the Pharisee. We said that last week. God can rescue you from prison; He can rescue you from Sunday school. He takes the "us" and the "them" and He puts them into a blender and mixes it up and He pours out a different drink. He pours out a new people; a new community that have put on the clothing of Jesus Christ. You know what the word for that is? Church.

It's not a building - thanks for the golf clap - it's not a building, it's not a social club for people of faith. It's not "Hey, we better attend there so that way God can put a star on our attendance chart." It's not let's come and sing a few Christian songs and listen to a nice little message and go home. It's not where two or three Christians get together at Starbucks and read their Bible. That's not a church. The church is a **movement** with a mission. The church is "Hey, we've been saved as individuals, but we weren't saved just for ourselves, we're saved now collectively as a community with a mission that God has given us. The church is a **movement** with a **mission**. This is why the very most central word of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is to little letters – **GO! Go** and make disciples... It always implies movement.

This leads us up to our passage in Matthew 5, which is the theme passage for this whole series. Matthew 5 is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth..." Now here's a question, does that mean flavoring or preservative? That's always a big debate people like to kind of argue it out.

Well, does this mean that the word Christian should be an adjective? Like we have Christian music, Christian movies, Christian clothing, Christian cruises, Christian dating services, is that what that means? So we have all this Christian subculture and we shake out our salt on the rest of the culture - is that what that means?

Well, I don't know, maybe you could make that application, but that's not what Jesus would have intended. That's not what His listeners would have heard. Here's the reason why. They didn't have refrigerators then and so the way that they kept their meat preserved was they would pack it in salt. So when they heard Jesus say, "You are the salt of the earth..." They're not necessarily thinking flavoring, maybe secondarily, but they are primarily thinking preservative. Jesus said, "You are the preservatives of the earth..."

Well, what are we trying to preserve? What we just talked about. The Gospel message in its fullness, but He goes on and He gives us the implications if we don't. He says, "...but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" Now from what I understand, I'm not a science major, but from what I understand scientifically salt cannot lose its saltiness. There's not a process where salt can be made unsalty, so what is Jesus talking about here? He's talking about dilution. He's talking about the diluting of salt. So, if you were using salt to preserve meat it would be a pretty bad thing if that salt got diluted. Right?

So if you were to take substance, kind of, look like salt, but it wasn't really salt and you were to mix it with the real salt and you pack meat in it then the meat would end up rotting a lot faster than what it was intended. Then he goes on and he says, "It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." Now what does Jesus mean by this? He's basically warning us, warning the church, from not becoming diluted salt, because if we are diluted salt then the Gospel message in its fullness, grace and truth, it ends up rotting. It deteriorates and then it's thrown out and trampled by men.

You know, I like to be liked, and I would imagine that most of you in this room, like to be liked, if you were to stand up and say, "No, I actually like to be disliked." We would all think you were weird and we would dislike you. Alright? Most of us like to be liked and the thing is, is that when God called you out of darkness and into light. When God saved you and when He extended his grace to you, He put you at odds with the culture in which we live. Now Jake is going to talk about this next weekend. A message that we've entitled "Resident Aliens" and it's the idea that our citizenship is in Heaven, but we are still residents here on earth, like a foreigner in a foreign county you don't - you're not completely dismissive of the culture in which you live, but you certainly don't fully buy into it either.

You are the citizen of another country, a "Kingdom" so to speak, that has not fully come yet or fully realized. So we are "resident aliens" so Jake is going to talk about that next week and how do we kind of function in that kind of environment. Here's the thing that Jesus is warning us of He's saying, that when we shy away from living, believing and communicating the fullness of the Gospel message, emphasis on **fullness**, grace, but not just grace, it's truth. Grace and truth. Sin and forgiveness. Brokenness and redemption.

There is a natural offense to the Gospel message, because I don't like to be told that I'm wrong. I don't like to be told that I'm a sinner and so when we remove that offense or when we remove the acceptance that comes from His grace then essentially the Gospel message - it rots on our watch,

because we are no longer agents of change and redemption. So here's what happens with a lot of churches and a lot of Christians. We try to give Jesus a makeover. We try to make the Bible a little bit more palatable to the times in which we live, by watering it down. Jesus essentially says, "You can try all of that, but inevitably the very thing you were trying to prevent is going to happen anyway, because the culture will just put its boots on and as the song goes it'll "...walk all over you.."

See the agents of change and redemption – it gets diminished because essentially there's nothing to be redeemed from – there's no edge to it. The Gospel has no teeth to it. Jesus goes on in verse 14, he says, "You are the light of the world." Now I want you to notice here that Jesus is mixing metaphors, it's one of His favorite things to do, so the three metaphors he uses in this passage are salt, light, and city and there's a reason for all of it. He says, "You are the salt of the world." Then He immediately switches metaphors He cannot stay focused like me. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket." So He's back to the light thing. "They put it on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven."

I think the reason why Jesus mixes metaphors on us, is because He wants us to understand the micro and the macro. He wants us to understand the individual call that we've all been given to be influencers in our world to be salt and light to the people in front of us, but we're also this light at a 30,000 foot level and I think this is why He immediately switches metaphors. He says, "You're a city on a hill." This doesn't mean that your faith is just individualistic. It's doesn't mean that this is just a private thing that you just keep between you and God.

How many of you could be a city all by yourself? Yeah. You can't. By practical definitions, that's not the definition of a city. Jesus says, "We're meant to do life together. You were meant to be called into this new community. You're meant to be held accountable to other brothers and sisters in Christ and you keep your eyes out ahead of you, not each other. Out ahead of you - on Jesus and the mission that He has given us to be in the world. There is so many people that I meet every single week and they say, "You know, I've just, kind of, feel like I've flat lined in my growth. I'm just not growing and I just feel stale." Maybe it could mean that you've taken your eyes off of the mission that Jesus has given us and you're not even aware of it. We could say it this way that most **growing in** Christ is done by **going for** Christ. You want to grow in Christ? Well, then don't sign up for another Bible study, **GO**.

Immobilize and own the mission that Jesus has put in front of us, because then we'll really truly begin to grow, because all of the sudden we've taken the spotlight off of ourselves. It's not on my own growth. All of the sudden as I take my eyes off of myself and I begin to invest into others and I begin to take seriously this Great Commission He's given us, it's not just for the church at large, it's for each of us individually. All of a sudden I look up and realize that I grew. When you begin to live in such a way as to say, "I'm living for something that is so much bigger than me and so much more important than me. It's something that going to outlast my existence here on this earth. That's enough."

When it's authentic that's enough to stand out within the world in which we live, because the primary message of the world is – it is all about you – this life is all you got so you better live it up and when they see a message that's dramatically different it's enough for them to sit up and take notice. The church is a movement with a mission and the mission maintains its movement when you and I are all in. I love how Paul describes this to the Ephesian church, another letter to a congregation in Ephesians 4:11-16 it's up on the screens. He's explaining this to them, and he says, "You know God gave the Apostles, the

prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and the teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry...”

So in other words he says all of you are equally important to God, but all of you have a different role to play. All of you have been gifted in a variety of different ways and it’s all been given to you “... for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attained in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood , to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

We are a city on a hill and that’s our purpose what He just communicated there. We all come from a different set of backgrounds and we all have a different story. Jesus obliterates the categories. It’s not “us” and “them”, it’s together in Christ. He mixes us up in a blender, pours out a completely different drink and He says, “You are a new people and this isn’t just for you yourself. This is for the mission that I’ve given you in the world in which you live.

I love the fact that within our church that we have people that take this seriously, who are salt and light, not just within our church, but out in the community. I’m thinking of a lady in our church named Lori, who has decided to reduce her time and energy devoted to her OB/GYN practice so that she can serve unwed mothers down in Beech Grove. I’m thinking of a guy named Earl in our church who takes his day off from the fire department to run a center for at risk kids in the city. I’m thinking of a young man in our church named Matt who takes his entire life group to volunteer one night a month at the Kingsway Care Center seeing patients and praying for them in the waiting room. I’m thinking of two ladies in our church named Lynnette and Kelly who take time out of their busy schedules to mentor high school and college age girls. I’m thinking about two other ladies, Elizabeth and Laura, who’ve to Kenya twice serving as RNs in the slums that we work with there.

Thinking of two teenagers in our church, Mary and Samuel, who offered to babysit the kids of young couples in their neighbor so that these young couples can go run errands, exercise or just have a break. I am thinking of another young lady, who is a clinical RN, who works for next to nothing, taking care of the marginalized and the uninsured. Thinking of a guy, named Mike, 66 year old grandfather who brought his granddaughter to our high school ministry, loved it so much, he decided to volunteer as a sponsor, takes a group of high school kids to Zionsville Meadows Nursing Home every Thursday to serve there. The students have started calling him the “Godfather”. I love that!

Guys, it takes almost 1,000 volunteers around here to make this all work. People that – more names that I can mention in one sermon – people that serve in the parking lot, people that change diapers and people that serve backstage and serve communion. People who you may never meet. People who may never be in the spotlight. They’ve gotten this glimpse of a vision that it’s not a task that just needs to be done, but they realize that when they volunteer in the nursery, what’s happening is that they’re freeing up a young couple so that they can completely focus on what’s happening in this room and maybe can hear and receive the fullness of the Gospel message for the first time. They are just as much a part of the process of that couple – that couple’s lives being changed by Jesus Christ as what I would be on this stage delivering the message.

This isn't just people in the parking lot just, kind of, trying to direct traffic this is people who are trying to ease the tension that's out there, so that way a first time visitor wouldn't just say forget that and never come back, but that they would come back so that God could maybe begin to do work in their life. If we don't begin to see it that way, then eventually we will burn out, eventually we will run out of volunteers and this isn't just a volunteer push, because I think churches are sometimes are guilty of saying, "Hey, if you really want to be called by God, then leave your place of employment and serve within the church." That's not what Jesus has called us to either. Jesus has called you to be salt and light where you live, work, and play. So part of my responsibility as your pastor is to help equip you and fill your cup so that you can be salt and light, not go dark and not be a screamer, but to put on Christ where you live work, and play and to fill your cup because I know you come in here every week running on fumes, because I realize that it's hard.

Everybody in here has a ministry that I will never have, because I'm a pastor so people, kind of, expect me to say some of these things, they don't necessarily expect you to say it. So when you're salt and light it makes a dramatic impact. I'm asking you, I'm inviting you to don't just attend church, be the church.

I've got a buddy, I only have one, and he's a good one. He works for a church consulting firm and they work with churches all over the nation and he told me this last week, right now there's about 325,000 churches in America today of all kinds. He said that as they've been studying this they've estimated that only about 10,000 – 15,000 of the 325,000 are serious about Matthew 28; The Great Commission. That was, kind of, stunning to me. I said, "You mean to tell me that only 10,000 – 15,000 churches out of the 325,000 are serious about the one thing that Jesus asked us to do. To go and make disciples?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, what are they serious about?" and he said, "Anything under the sun, you name it." Serious about preserving tradition, serious about keeping everybody happy, serious about, you know, exemplifying some social agenda, serious about everything but The Great Commission and putting that front and center and in front of us to keep our eyes fixed upon it. No wonder the church is losing ground in America today. So I want to ask you to begin to not just attend church, but to be the church and you be the church by keeping your eyes on the mission that Jesus has given us to be salt and light. Very few of us, maybe, have arrived at that mentality.

I lied a little bit earlier, I actually have another buddy. I have two friends. He's a pastor at a church in Florida and he was telling me recently that he took his son hog hunting. I've never been hog hunting, sounds fascinating, I'd probably shoot my foot. He was out with his son hog hunting they found the hog and he aimed his gun at the hog, took the hog down with one shot. Didn't exactly know what to do with it after that, so he took it to a friend of his that owns a BBQ restaurant. His friend said, "Hey, man I'd be happy to prepare this for you. I'll pack the meat all up and I'll give it to you free of charge." So he says, "Man, that's awesome, thank you." So he gets this meat the very next week, his daughter has a birthday party. So they decided to serve the pork from the hog that he shot to the family that was coming over for the birthday party, but they decided not to tell anyone, because they didn't want people to feel kind of squeamish about eating pork from a pig he had shot.

So they come in and they serve it all up on the table and his sister-in-law she's, kind of, hovering around the pork plate. She's looking at it and it doesn't exactly look like what she's used to seeing. So she asking him, "Justin, um, where did you get this meat?" He was like, "Oh, I got it at the BBQ joint down the road." He technically didn't lie, he did get it from there. So she's like, "Okay that's a reputable place." So she gets a plate and piles her plate up. They all, kind of, dig in and in the middle of meal, they're all

talking about how good this meal is and then his son lets it slip. He says, “Yeah, Daddy then took it down with one shot.” Immediately, everybody freezes and his sister-in-law actually spit it out of her mouth.

This is what she said, she goes, “I didn’t realize I was eating meat from something that someone had killed.” Is there any other way? And then she said that, “If had to kill something or watch something be killed, I’d probably just starve.” Justin, kind of, looked at her, “Like, a minute ago, you were chowing down on it and you were enjoying it and now since you’ve found out where it came from, you don’t like it.” She’s like “Yeah, exactly, that’s right, I like meat, I just don’t to do anything to get it. I don’t even want to know where it came from.”

Everybody loves a good meal, but not everybody’s up for preparing it. Unfortunately, this is how so many people treat God’s church. This is our mindset, when it comes to spiritual food. Everybody loves meat professionally served and prepared up the way that I like it, but I don’t want to do anything in order to get it. I don’t even really want to know how it gets to me. I just want it, the way that I want, when I want it.

What has happened is that Jesus’ radical missionary movement of disciples who’ve been called out of darkness and into light all that is become diluted with this mentality that we’re, kind of, this social club of critics or where this is a spiritual supermarket where we go to get religious goods and services. So I want meat I just don’t want to do anything to get and I don’t even really want to know where it comes from.

So I want a church that has the best teaching and that has the right amount of substance and the right time and is entertaining enough that it keeps my attention. Just don’t ask me to apply any of it. We want to go to a church that has the best children’s ministry that keeps their attention and begs them for coming back for more, just don’t ask us to volunteer with the kids. We want a church that has really good music, just as long as it’s the kind of music that I like. We want to go to a church that is warming and welcoming and inviting, just as long as I don’t have to be. You know who you are, come on. You’re like, “Nobody was friendly today.” Well, I don’t blame them man, you look like you just ate a sour grape or something. I don’t know if there’s such a thing as a sour grape? Just fill in – just finish this sentence, I want a church that _____. Would you have your list?

Often times this gets communicated to me this way, we’ll be in a membership class or whatever and people say, “Yeah, we’re church shopping and here’s our shopping list. Here are all the things we’re looking for.” Now it’s not a bad thing to be a church shopper. All of us will be and have been church shoppers at some point in our lives. You should, you should shop for a church that is serious about Jesus and serious about the Bible and loves people where they are. You should – that should be on your list. Is it? A lot of times it’s not. Our shopping lists are actually very self-centered and if you are church shopping more than you are church landing then just might be a problem. I want a church that _____? You know what Jesus would say to us? He would say, “Put you list away. You are the church.”

1 Corinthians 12:27 in the New Living Translation says, “All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.” Jesus would say, “Hey, stop just attending church and be the church.” When you lift up the name of Jesus, He draws all men and women into Himself. Not that long ago, just confessing to you, that I was really, sort of, uncomfortable about being in and a part of a larger church. Just

because of the things that get said about larger churches and the criticism that comes your way, just because of a large church.

So I would try to deflect that and I didn't want to talk about it. I'm quickly getting over that. The reason why is because the big seat church as a whole is losing ground in our nation today. Only 10,000 – 15,000 churches are serious about the Great Commission, 3,000 churches are closing their doors every year in America. We are starting 1,500 churches a year, but losing conservatively about half of them. Numbers are important to Jesus because numbers represent people that He died for. Jesus says, "If my name be lifted up, then I'm going to draw all men and women under myself and the result of that will be growth."

I understand the concern is that as we grow as a church, how do we stay grounded and humble? Here's the simple equation that I want us to live by. If we take our eyes off of Jesus then growth is **bad**, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus then growth is **good**. So simple isn't it. Blows your mind! Right?

It's like if we take our eyes off of Jesus, man, growth is **bad** because we're drawing people here for something other than Him, but if it's – we keep our eyes on Him then growth is **good** it should be embraced, it should be celebrated because that's a life that has been changed. We don't keep the glory for ourselves, we deflect the glory and give it to God and we say, "God we're humble and hungry our hands are open what do you want to do with us next?"

I don't want to be a mega-church; I want to be a micro-church with a mega-vision! What is that? Well, let me try to paint a picture for you. A micro-church with a mega-vision is a church where you don't have to know everybody, just know somebody. It's a church **of** small groups, not a church **with** small groups. It's a church where it isn't about "me", it's about "we". It's a church where life change stories are the norm and not the exception. Where we never get used to it, but always expect it and we celebrate it. A church that is serious about the mission of Matthew 28, a church that doesn't apologize for growing and multiplying. A church that is radically involved around our globe meeting the felt needs of others, a church that plants churches and reproduces itself, and a church that raises up and develops people to be both salt and light. That's the kind of church I want to be a part of. Not just this big conglomerate, but a micro-church with a mega-vision, because you and I have been called out of darkness and Jesus says, "Don't you dare hold on to that or keep it to yourself. You pass it on to others."

A little bit later this year - I've shared this with you a couple of weeks ago, that both services are rapidly reaching capacity, so it looks like this fall when we open up the children's wing we're going to add a third service and most likely that's going to be on a Saturday night. I really believe that this is going to give us an opportunity to reach a whole different segment of people that maybe normally wouldn't come on a Sunday morning. I stop at the Starbucks across the interstate every Sunday morning at six am to get some coffee and the Barista that's over there she told me that, "If you ever add a Saturday night service, I'll be there every weekend." I'm going to hold her to it.

So this fall I want you – I'm sharing that with you, number one for you to first of all be praying that Saturday night service. That God would already be preparing the hearts and minds of people that He would want to come to that service. I'm asking that you would maybe begin talking about this and praying about it that, maybe, you might become a Saturday night service person. Maybe, 500 or 600 people on Sunday morning, about 250 to 300 in each service will say, "We'll go on Saturday night to free up some space on Sunday morning so people can continue to come here and there would be a good critical mass on Saturday night to continue to grow and I want you to be thinking about people that you

can invite to that Saturday night service for the simple fact that we want to believe and live out and share the fullness of the Gospel message.

I want to leave you with this thought this morning as we close. I want you and I to be the church you've always wanted to attend. I want you to think about what that means. Have you ever said, "You know, what I really would just love to find a church that is serious about the Bible." Well then are you serious about the Bible? "Say, I really want to find a church that is loving." Well, I need to be loving. "I really want to find a church that has a big view of God and accepts people from any walk of life." Then do you have a big view of God and are you warm and loving and accepting of people. Now here's the thing, when that begins to happen, when you begin to be the church that you always wanted to attend you wake up one morning and you're attending the church you've always wanted to attend, because each one of us chose to be salt and light and we say, "God this is a message that you've given to us to never hang on to ourselves, but to give it to others."

Let me pray for us this morning. "Father, we come to you this morning, grateful and thankful for your love that reaches all of us and so God we come to you in a very humble spirit to be reminded of our own story and what you've done to reach us. God I ask that you would be the lead pastor of this church that Jesus Christ would be the one that people would see as they come in here in our environment and the looks on our faces and the words that are spoken and the songs that are sung. That people would come to know you, the fullness of the Gospel message, grace and truth. God give us a big vision for what it is that you want us to do, what it is you want us to be about as a church and that we would stay grounded in the fact that we give you all the glory for it. We ask this right now in Jesus name and collectively the church says, "Amen".