



Christian Love-Part 4
Loving God's Challenging Work
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well if you're ever brave enough to stroll down Hollywood Boulevard you are sure to run into the Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum, one of several across our country. And if you are bold enough to lay down your \$20 as about 12 million people a year do in our country you will be able to enter into what they call the Odd-itorium, O-D-D, the Odd-itorium. And you will see the shrunken heads and you will see the man with a snake crawling up his nose and out of his mouth. You'll see the two-headed pig. You'll see the replica of the nine-foot tall man. You'll see the mule-faced woman. She's pretty. There'll be plenty in there to certainly stretch your sense of credulity. They are going to do that to you because the things that are in there certainly are odd. They are odd, they're not things you see everyday. They're things that seem outside the norm. You run into those things, you think, well I don't know if that's even possible. That seems like it can't happen or it can't be and of course they're saying well believe it or not it's the truth and they try to show you these very odd things that are very hard to believe. Now I've got to think as we've been studying through the Gospel of Luke and we've come upon Chapter 17 in our verse by verse study that surely the Apostles felt a little bit like they'd walked into the Odd-itorium listening to Jesus speak of things that at first seem very common and normal and reasonable.

But before long, talk about stretching their sense of credulity, all of a sudden Jesus starts saying things that seem absolutely crazy. They seem outlandish. There was one thing to start the chapter talking about the fact that temptations to sin are bad and you're going to run into those in life but then to say, hey, if you are the source of temptation for one of these little ones, one of these Christians, my followers, it would be better for you to have a cement donut thrown around your neck and put into the sea and drown. Whoa. Really? And then to say, well, you know, you're supposed to forgive but not just forgive once or twice but even if someone, the same person, seven times in one day wrongs you, you ought to be so forgiving that you're going to forgive and forgive and forgive. Talking about unusual. At some point they've got to say, well this is crazy. I'm not sure if that's possible. I don't think anyone can actually do that. Well, that certainly was something I said as we started last time we're together, that has to be how the disciples felt and so Jesus, we see, gives them some comfort by saying, well, if you would trust me. Thus, we looked at the miracle of new birth. We looked at the work of the Spirit in our lives last time we were together. Listen, I can make you do things, I can enable you to do things. I can empower you to do things that you didn't think were possible.

You need to trust me. Of course we need to work. But you need to trust me and we can do things that you didn't think you could do to live up to the standards that I'm calling you to in this particular context, which is not just in Chapter 17 but throughout the teaching of what he's calling his disciples to do in the Gospel of Luke. But still it leaves you with that sense of, "OK I'm going to trust you but it's going to be a lot of work, it is going to be costly. Can you imagine how much I'm going to have to swallow in terms of someone coming and wronging me and I got to repeatedly forgive them forgive them forgive them and all these other things you've said about living holy and righteous lives. It just seems like too much." Well, when you go to the Ripley's Believe It Or Not they'll say, if you don't believe what's here it's because you don't have enough information. I mean here's a replica of a nine foot tall man and I know you don't think that's possible. But here are some other replicas of some other people that were also as tall. Here's the background on this guy and here's where he lived and here are his pictures and here's how tall he was when he was in sixth grade and you start to go, wow, I guess that is true. And that's what they claim. You just need some

background information, you need some context, you need to see how this works and then you'll leave going, well, I guess this is true. Well Jesus, in essence, does that with a story he begins to tell in verse number 7. And for four verses that we're going to look at today, he says if you could just get this background information on what I'm asking you to do, you could start to see that not only is this possible but it makes perfect sense and it is how you should live your Christian life. So take a look at these verses with me. I'm reading from the English Standard Version beginning in verse 7 of Luke 17. Follow along with me, it's printed there on your worksheet. If you've got that in your worship packet or you can grab that Bible that's under the seat in front of you, as I read for you when Jesus continues his teaching by saying this: "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he's come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at the table?'" No, I don't think I would say that if he were my servant. No. "Wouldn't he rather say to him," there's another rhetorical question, "'Prepare supper for me, dress properly.'" Get on a clean shirt. "'Serve me while I eat and drink and then afterwards you'll eat and drink.'" Does the master here "thank the servant because he did what was commanded?" Well another rhetorical question, I've got three rhetorical questions in a row and he answer every time is, well, that's not the way things would work. That is the way a master would treat a servant and certainly he wouldn't have to thank the servant for doing it, that's his job. Now he ties all this together after the difficult, high bar teaching of what he's asking these disciples to do and he says, "So you also, when you've done all that you were commanded, say," here comes, "We are unworthy servants. We've only done what was our duty."

Now, I admit right out of the gate, this is a kind of teaching that is very unusual in our day. And in our culture when it comes to Christianity in the western church in particular, these are some hard words for people to read and think, wow, I just can't imagine that's how Jesus would have us view ourselves. Well, that is how Jesus would have us view ourselves and he's doing for us a great service and getting us to look at God's high standard for our lives and saying if you could just get some background information as to how this all works, if you could just understand who I am and who you are and what your duty is you can understand this. And not only that you could trust me to do the things I've called to do and in the end, as we'll see, it's the best way for you to live your life.

It's going to be fulfilling and satisfying. It will be great. It will be the thing that will make you sit back at the end of your life and say that was a life well lived. And I would certainly like that and if you would here's the key. Let's start again in verse number 7 and just observe the simple terms that are used to define the categories.

Master is implied when he says which one of you who has, that's the master, a servant. The word, a very strong word, the slave, the one who is owned by the master, who is out there plowing in the fields and you can picture him in the heat of the day with sweat rolling off of his brow or maybe he's keeping sheep out there and he's been wandering around and walking all day. Which one will say to him when he's come in from the field, now this seems silly, of course, in the first century, "Hey, come at once and recline at the table?" If you're going to say that as the master then that puts you in the position of the servant and it puts your servant in the position of being waited on by you.

That doesn't make any sense. That's certainly not how this would work. That's the kind of statement that would get them to say, that is not how it works with a master and a servant.

Because we don't confuse those roles and no one gets lost in their definitions of who they are when they have a home, they're the land owner, they have a farm, they own the property and they have people working for them. Of course the workers are going to work and the masters are going to be



served. That's just how this works.

Well, this is a good place for us to start. When it comes to where we are as Christians when we think about the high standards that Jesus lays before us we need to stop and to think for a second who we're dealing with. When God gives us a command, this comes not as a peer who's just giving us some advice. He's certainly not our therapist or our life coach. He's not our cosmic buddy, he's not just a friend who's trying to give you some pointers on how to live. This is the God of the universe. This is the immortal one speaking to mortals. This is the infinite one speaking to the finite. This is the creator of all things speaking to the creatures. That would be a good way to put it so that we do not make the category error that so many people make when it comes to their theology. Number one, let's put it down this way. We need to avoid the Creature-Creator confusion that it seems so many people have. And you may say, oh, I don't think about it that way. Don't we though sometimes? Don't we sometimes think of God as the one who is there to serve us because he is such a giving, gracious, loving, merciful God and he is all of that. But much like you might see on the screen of some Disney movie, some animated film where some big, gracious lion who takes an interest in condescension to a bunch of little mice in the jungle.

I mean you would, at least by the depiction on a screen, you would never lose sight of who the king of the jungle is and who he's being kind to. You would think if you're a little rodent there running around at the foot of the lion receiving all these wonderful, merciful, gracious things from the king of the jungle, you'd never lose sight of who he is.

Well you wouldn't because he'd be there towering over you every time you spoke with him, at least in this Disney film that I'm talking about. But see with God, it's easy for us not to picture him that way because he's the invisible God. He's a God we don't see.

And even the statements about that invisible nature of God, it says in First Timothy Chapter 6, he is a God who dwells in unapproachable light. He is the only king, immortal, eternal. I mean even the statements about God saying you can't see him, it's not because he's just behind some veil somewhere, it's because he's so great and so majestic you couldn't see him because he's unseeable, he dwells in unapproachable light. In other words, the point of us not being able to picture the God of the Bible, which was prohibited from the beginning to make any images of this God, it was because he's so great, he's so transcendent, he's so other, he's so categorically different than you. And what's amazing is that we can sit here and have communication from God to us inscribed in the pages of the Bible where he gives us instruction and to think about where that instruction is coming from, should leave all of us standing back saying, it's amazing, that the king of the universe would have something for me to do. And it should come with a sense of deference. It should come with a sense of respect. It should come with a kind of statement that is made in Isaiah Chapter 66 that those who understand their role between a God who is like one who would just use the Earth as a footstool for his chair that when he speaks we would tremble at his word.

That's not a comfortable concept for modern 21st century evangelical Christians but it's the Biblical perspective that when he speaks we're ready, what is it that you have to say?

Because the creator is talking to the creature and I guarantee you Michael the archangel or Gabriel up there who is some kind of high-ranking entity, I guarantee you they tremble at his word.

And if the highest ranking creatures that were ever created would tremble at the commands of the Almighty God, how should we, who would recognize our diminutive and humble nature next to the



highest of archangels, how should we respond when God has instructions for us? If he says, hey, forgive. Oh, no. Forgive. No, forgive forgive forgive forgive endlessly if someone sins.

I guess we should look at that command as a non-optional, binding instruction that we are to carry out regardless of how we feel about it or how difficult it seems.

Even when we think we've come in from the field and we've done our Christian work for the day, we sacrificed enough, we've forgiven enough, we've served enough, we've gone the extra mile, we spent the extra dollar, we stayed the extra hour, I don't want to spend anymore. And he says, no, no, we're not done yet. You're in the house now. It's time for dinner.

It's time to prepare dinner. Even if it seems like overtime when we should be getting time and a half, that's not the way the servant thinks of the master. If you've got your pen out or you've got your device out, please type in or write down, if you would, Malachi Chapter 1 beginning in verse 6.

It would be a good passage for you to look up, especially if you are in one of our small groups. It would be a good passage to read before you go to your small group this week, just to look at the way there is a category distinction that God never wants us to lose in remembering who we are when he gives us instructions. Much like our passage when Jesus says, listen, when it comes to directions coming from a master, it's coming to a servant, you need to remember these are two categorically different groups. He says, not only in Malachi 1, I'm a master and you're the servant but he says this, it's kind of like being a parent and you being a child. Now he makes a statement, it's not universally true in our day but certainly back in that day, it was much more common than it is now and that is this, doesn't a son honor his parents?

Isn't a son looking to his father with a great deal of respect? And he says if I'm a father and that's the way you address me in prayer, that's how you address me in your songs, well, if I'm the father, where's my honor?

I think about this on a day like today when I hope all of you woke up with a deference to please your mothers and if you happened to be graced by having your mother still around and you have a chance geographically to be around her today and it comes to lunch plans, I hope you're giving deference to what she wants, even if she wants some frou-frou lunch at, you know, I don't know, what's the one I always knock all the time? Panini Grill or? What's the real frou-frou one, the lunch place where all those girls go? Panera Bread, that's it. See, I can't even bring it to mind. Panera Bread.

Now, if my wife says to me after this service, "Honey, I'd like to go to Panera Bread." It's kind of how the words are supposed to be said, I think. "Panera Bread."

And I'm thinking, oh, I've got a hankering just to drive through Del Taco. I would hope as a husband on a day like today, I'd say, listen, I should be honoring my wife or, better yet, what about my kids saying, "No Mom, let's just drive through McDonald's."

It really didn't matter what you would prefer in this case. It should be that today of all days that we should honor mom, we should do all that we can do to give deference to mom. And if children, at least on days like today, I hope, go the extra mile to honor their parents or honor their mothers, and if I'm an authority, if I'm a parental figure, if I'm the father, then where's my respect?



Master-servant, parent-child. He gives one more in that passage, that's very helpful, he says, it's like me being a governor or a governmental official and you being a citizen. And he says, you know, the way you can tell that you've lost that high view of me that you should have? You should look at the way you respond to my commands to you.

And now one of the commands of the Old Testament when you came to church was to bring your offering and your offering in that day was the first fruits of the field. And the segment, that tenth of your flock, and you were supposed to bring those to God.

Now, if I had a hundred sheep and I was going to bring 10 for an offering, well they would make a decision to say, well, here's the ten I can spare. It's kind of like the old missionary barrel that used to be in the lobbies of the churches when I grew up. I mean, that was like a trash receptacle for stuff that was no longer worthy to be in your home, so let's give that to God and the work of God. And so it was the Old Testament that they had a view of God that said, listen, I you really can't use these lame or blind or diseased or sick animals. Anyway, I could never sell them. They're really not much use to me anyway. Let's bring those and give those to God. And he says, listen, would you bring that kind of gift to your governmental officials?

Would your governor receive you kindly if you brought that kind of gift to him?

And he said if I'm some kind of leader, where's at least your deference to see me the way you should. Categorically, citizens should know their leaders. Categorically, children should understand who their parents are and certainly categorically, a servant should know who his master is. And let's just keep this straight, if I give you a command to forgive five times or fifty-five times, it's coming from creator to creature. The infinite distance between those two, something we call a transcendent categorical ontological spread between the creator and the created should remind us every time we open our Bibles and see that God has an expectation of us to say, wow, I need to tremble at that word.

I need to recognize these instructions are coming from someone who has the right to give those instructions. Avoid the Creature-Creator confusion that happens often. You may not like everything that the Lord asks you to do but you should recognize his authority.

I thought of that yesterday when I turn on the news and it was kind of surreal scene when I saw the president speaking live yesterday and I looked and in the screen shot was a friend of mine sitting about 10 feet from him and they, right when I turned it on the, he stood up and he shook his hand. I had to text him at that moment and I did, you know, "Say hi to the President for me." Closest I've been to that president. But, I thought, I know my friend does not agree with everything that the president stands for. I certainly know my friend does certainly not agree with everything my president does in his life or his standards. I understand all of that, but it was interesting to watch him with a very respectful, deferential, you know, I could tell by his body language this is not the way he normally acts to sit there and very deferentially reach out his hand and shake the president's hand. And I thought, wow! And then I was even motivated to text him because of that. And you're shaking hands with the president. I'm seeing you on live TV right now.

I thought to myself why does he do that? Because even in a situation where he may say I don't like everything you stand for and I don't like everything you do, I don't like all your policies, but this is THE PRESIDENT.



I can't say that like you used to when most sons respected their fathers and most servants respected their masters and most citizens respected their leaders.

But even today I think most reasonable people recognize authority and God says there is one thing you should know about me is I am the authority and you need never forget that. On days like today when we think about what the Bible says regarding God and our view of God that needs to be maintained as a high view of God, the corrective is welcomed, I hope. It's not received, I hope, as some kind of stinging rebuke but as a very welcomed reminder that we need to keep first things first and we need to keep our authority in our minds clarified and defined on the person who has and possesses all authority.

I remember that when I was a teenager in college, I went to, at least in my little corner of the world, I went to very prestigious, in my thinking, theological institution to be trained and I go off to this place that kind of reeks of the Dead Poets Society at least in theological circles in my mind and I'm out there.

And again like most teenagers I start to become critical of the school that I am at and I sit around and, you know, talk in my dorm room and in my lounge about how if I were in charge I'd do this and they don't like this policy, they don't like the way the school does that and we start criticizing the administrators and the professors and we eventually get around to criticizing the president. The president of our prestigious, long standing school with a great legacy and a lot going on that all of us should stand back and respect but of course we're getting through our pimply stage, you know, season of life and we think we know everything and so we got into the habit of even calling him by his first name as we talked about him in our dorm room. Oh, Dr. Sweeting, but we called him George. George ought to do this, and I wonder what George thinks of that?

I'll never forget on one snowy winter day I was walking through the hallways of this hallowed institution, and as I came around the corner, here was coming toward me the president of the institution with his little entourage of guys in their nice black suits and white shirts and as they come around the corner without even thinking of it just slipped out of my mouth.

"Hey George."

My president stopped. His entourage stopped. He turned and looked at me. I realized at that moment I'd done something I should not have done. And he said, "Son, you'll address me as Dr. Sweeting." I said, "I'm so sorry Dr. Sweeting." And I went away with my shoulders hunched forward, feeling like if ever there was a time I deserved a corrective, it was right there.

I didn't go away thinking how arrogant is that man. I didn't sit there and think, this isn't right, we're equal, we're both made of the same stuff. I said you're the president of this institution and I'm some slimy faced freshman on campus.

There's no way I should be addressing you by your first name and I welcomed the correction and I guarantee I never did it again.

And I realized the only way for me to address that president or say the right things or make the right decisions in light of his authority on that campus was for me in the privacy of my own heart and in the discussions I'm having behind closed doors to give him respect in every thought that I have



that's appropriate to the task.

Now, of course, he's not the king of the universe but the one I pray to every morning is. When I address him, he even taught me to pray by starting out by reminding myself that he is our Father and that's great, he's a gracious king of the universe. But I've got to remember that his name is hallow, "Hallowed be thy name."

I need to remember who he is and I hope when you address God he's not become someone who is there to serve you but you are there to serve him, which is made very clear in this passage in the next verse, verse number 8, when he says you're not going to tell the servant, "Hey, come on in and sit down or recline at the table," no you're going to say, "Prepare supper for me." I know you've worked all day. I know you're sunburnt. I know you're your clothes are all dirty but change your clothes, dress properly, serve me, it's time for you to do more for me. Then if you have some needs we'll get to those.

Number two on your outline, let's just remind ourselves that we are here to serve the king. That is your purpose, that's why you were created. If you ever get in your mind an honest evaluation and appraisal that your view of God is not where it needs to be and you start to see that God's becoming your cosmic buddy, your friend, your life coach, your therapist or whatever it might be and you realize you're demanding things of God and you're not giving God your best and you start complaining about every extra hour, every extra mile, every extra dollar that it's costing you to be a Christian, then you need to stop and you just say why am I even born? What am I here for?

There are a great set of statements in the Mishnah. The Mishnah was the oral tradition of the Jews. It finally was codified and put into a written form around 200 A.D. It's the oldest written tradition of the rabbinic teaching and wisdom. And Avot, the book of Avot in the Mishnah, which is "The Fathers" in Hebrew, that list of the wisdom of the fathers there, the teaching of the fathers, gives you continued reminders that the whole purpose for our being here is to serve God, serve the king, take his instructions and do it. I love the way you see frequently this rejoinder, this concept, as we in our own flesh think, I deserve reward, I deserve to be recognized, why doesn't God serve me. Now, it's not put that crassly in the third century but certainly the rabbis recognize this: you need to never do something for God, this is the Mike Fabarez paraphrase of the third century Mishnah, you should never do something for God saying, "God, I expect that if I do this then you do that." There's never a quid pro quo in this. You don't serve him, you don't study the word, you don't do what it says so that you'll get some kind of reward. That should never be your mindset going in to respond to the king.

It says a chapter later in Avot, the third chapter, in the writing of the wisdom of the rabbi, it says and even when you work really hard at it and you sweat and you toil and you work and you do what the Torah says and you give it your all, it says never think of boasting, Mike Fabarez paraphrase. But this is the literal translation as I can get.

Just remember this is your purpose. This is what you were created for. And I think to myself, that's a good way for us to start thinking about the fact that I'm serving God this week and I may lose a reputation in this little corner of the office, I may lose a client because I stand up for what's right, I may in the end lose a free night because I'm serving the agenda of the king. All of those things become very understandable if I can just get the background information that God is God and I am his servant and therefore when it comes to things that I want, like another free night, like a few of my extra dollars kept and like never having a reputation problem because I'm following some Jesus



in a fanatical way, that I need to say, when it comes to all that, I'll get all that pushed back to the second tier priority of my life and it is about priorities. When it comes down to it, it is about priorities. That's why Jesus in a very familiar passage you've heard a hundred times, Matthew Chapter 6 verse 33, it says, listen, "Seek first the Kingdom." I just wonder if you just took that simple phrase, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," I wonder if you just take that phrase and you think how much has that been a governing, guiding principle of my week? Have I really thought in terms of I want to take the agenda of God in my work place, in my family, in my parenting, in my friendships, in my recreation, in my summer plans and say, what would God want me to do to put his agenda before my own. Now I know my agenda for the summer, I know my agenda for a vacation, I know my agenda for my friendships, I know my agenda for the afternoon. I have some very obvious things that I want.

Am I willing to take the things that I want, like a servant who says I'll have to eat and drink when I'm done serving the master's food, am I willing to say, let me just put his agenda first? And I know the context, by the way, of Matthew 6. Do you know the context of Matthew 6? They were all concerned about what they were going to eat, what they're going to wear, where they're going to live, all their stuff and he says, listen, the Gentiles chase after all that stuff, in other words that's their top priority. Your top priority should be my agenda and then all those things will be added to you. When you feel like you've gone the extra mile, you've forgiven one too many times, you've served one too many hours, you've given one too many dollars to the kingdom purpose, you need to say, listen, I recognize this when it comes to what I need God is going to meet those needs. All these things will be added to you. I put his agenda first. I see myself as a Christian first and an architect second, a plumber second, a housewife, a mother, a government official, all that second to my role as representing Christ in my daily life. When it comes down to it, it's not just about duty in terms of behavior, it's about duty in terms of my heart's loyalties. That's why, if I'm thinking of priority, I'm going to go in my mind to when Jesus says to a whole Church in Ephesus, you know the problem is, Revelation Chapter 2, you've left your first love, something here is not where it used to be.

So go back in your mind to where you used to be, which I hope the moment you became a Christian, when you said to God, I know my sin problem, I see you've met it, I need to trust you because I'm a sinner who needs forgiveness, I hope at that moment you had Christ in the right place in your mind. You had God seated on that throne. You were someone who in your mind said I know where the leadership of my life is going to be from now on.

He's the Lord, he's in charge. And if that's been your thinking at the moment of your conversion, if you're still not there, here Jesus would say to you what he said to the Ephesians, go back to your first love, do those deeds you did at first, make sure your heart and your hearts loyalty and devotion is where it used to be because it's easy for us to fall in love with our children, to fall in love with our job, to fall in love with our vacation home, our zip code whatever it might be to where no longer do I see my controlling passion in life is to be a Christian who serves and glorifies God in everything I do. Which means, by the way, Ephesians Chapter 5, you're going to have to be seeking that kind of answer. In other words, you're going to have to, here's how it's put in Ephesians 5, "discern what is pleasing to the Lord." Always working to discern what is pleasing to the Lord and you need to ask that question about everything in your life. What would please the Lord here about this? Now God is always going to care for his servants. He's always going to give you time to deal with stuff you've got to deal with. But you don't assume it, you don't take it upon yourself. You say God I want your agenda first and I'll let you add the other things to me. So how can I be a Christian first in this family, how can I be a Christian first in this office, how can you do those things that are required of



me as a servant of Christ?

And then I know you're going to take care of the other things that I need taken care of. If you ask those questions, as Ephesians 5 verse 10 says, discerning what is pleasing to the Lord, I guarantee you it's going affect you in some very practical ways.

Let's just imagine for a moment that you work at Saddleback Hospital. You're a nurse, technician, radiologist, doctor, surgeon, whatever. And you knew that this afternoon you had the owner, let's just say it was a singular owner, he was an entrepreneur, he built this whole medical industry from the ground up in terms of Saddleback Hospital. He was one who employed everybody, he built this thing from nothing and he is signing your paychecks, he's the boss. He's coming in with his wife, nine months pregnant, about to give birth to his first-born son.

Do you think a memo would go out? Do you think people would know he's coming? Yes.

You think you'd clear a room for him, make sure it's clean? Get the corner room? His wife's going to have a baby so you do all you can to roll out the red carpet. Here comes the boss. He's going to use this hospital now. Let's say you worked in the maternity ward and you're there in Labor and Delivery and you think, OK, here comes the boss. Now the boss comes in and his wife is having a baby now, it's not him having a baby and the baby is not him, but this is his wife and his child. Do you think at any minute you would get confused in terms of a categorical error about who the patient is? Do you think you'd have any kind of confusion about who the servant is? Do you think at any moment you'd find yourself at the nurse's station, if you're a nurse in the Labor and Delivery ward, just playing on an Xbox or something?

I guarantee you, you would put that all away.

You would make sure that every need was met. If the baby was crying, you don't think that you would make sure that even before that sound wave went down the hallway to where your boss was, you were there attending to that child? Of course, because you'd know this is the boss. I am a servant. I'm here to serve. The whole industry is about serving people.

But now I have a chance to serve the boss, the owner, the operator of the very hospital I'm a part of you. You would do all you could to make that right. Christianity is a service industry, if you will.

You are, the Bible says, serving those around you as though you were serving Christ. As a matter of fact, even if you were to give a cup of cold water, one that maybe you could have drunk yourself but you're going to give it to someone because you're doing it for the kingdom priorities, the Bible says it's as though you gave that cup of water to Christ himself. And if you have opportunity to serve him this week knowing that you're responding to the very commands that he gives you, whether it's something like forgiveness or whether it's extra mile, extra dollar, extra hour, I'm going to do what God asked me to do. I guarantee you God takes it personally and he receives it as a gift to him even if you're doing it to little kids in a weeknight program or being a counselor in some kind of, you know, youth event at our church or whether it's sharing the gospel with some coworker. God sees this as a gift to him and it's something that I think if we keep this straight in our minds that you were there for that very purpose you could not lose sight of this. Now, just for the sake of clarity and it may be good for us to think this way in this passage, if you look at the commands in this text, I know they reflect the Father's commands, but it's Christ who's giving them commands to forgive seven times a day. Right?



And in this passage, if you are to say, well, who, and though there's not an immediate antecedent to who the master is, we know the servants are, that's the disciples and by extension that's us, but who is the master in this story? Who is it that is expecting us to obey and go that extra mile when we've worked all day in the fields and now we got to set the table and serve the master? Who is it?

Well, I think if you were carefully looking at the passage you would have to be Jesus Christ because he's the one in the immediate context giving the commands. And I just know that it's hard for us as Christians who've grown up with this view of the King of Kings serving us, and he does so graciously and mercifully serve us, that we, as the rodents in my opening illustration there in the first point, unfortunately don't see him as this majestic beast of the jungle anymore. We have domesticated him to a house cat and we do that because we read in the pages of scripture, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in particular, of a very humble Jesus who sits there and is allowing himself to be stripped naked and beaten by Roman soldiers and thrown on a Roman execution rack and he never answers back. He's like a lamb led to slaughter and he never roars.

And because of that, you may read the words of Jesus when He asks you to share the gospel, when he asks you to disciple people, when he asks you to forgive people, when he asks you to serve people, you may picture him as that lamb, when in reality he's not a lamb anymore, you understand that?

Oh, he was a lamb in his first coming because he veiled the deity that he possesses, the authority to just throw you on the ground if you were to look at him, which happened only at one point when he pulled back the curtain, it is called the Mount of Transfiguration, and he let his disciples see, for just a minute, his glorified state. He prayed in the garden just before he went to the cross and in the Great High Priestly prayer of John 17 he said, you know, there's going to be, in just a short time after I finish this course that you've set me on, I'm going to have the glory returned to me that I had before I entered the world. So before the incarnation there was a kind of glory and majesty and radiant authority that I had that's going to be replaced to me. And it was replaced and when he came back and visited one of his dearest friends, the disciple that Jesus loved, John the Apostle, on the island of Patmos, he sat there and showed up to visit with him and give him a picture of the end times and when he did and he showed up, what happened to John?

He didn't give him a high five. He didn't run up and hug him. Jesus showed up in his glorified state like he did on the Mount of Transfiguration because that's the only Jesus that's left right now. And John fell on his face trembling. He had a clear picture of the authority of Christ in an unmitigated fashion and when he spoke it wasn't like these wafty clouds of cotton words coming out of his mouth. The Bible says out of his mouth can a sharp, two-edged sword. When Jesus speaks and he tells you to forgive that person who you're holding bitterness against, and that's how the passage started.

You having the command come immediately from Christ and when Christ speaks and he says, "Go make disciples of all the nations baptizing them," which by the way, if you sat here during that announcement this morning, you say, "Yeah, baptism, I'm sure..." Jesus commanded, the sharp two edged sword out of the mouth of the one in that passage in Revelation Chapter 1, his eyes are like burning fire, he stands there in glory saying to you, "Hey, if you're a follower, then you be baptized."

And he says, "Go teach them to observe all that I commanded you." When he says those things, it



comes with all the authority of the Father. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that God the Father in his otherly, transcendent character, the one that we're going to relate to, is his Son, so he says, listen, I want all humanity to focus their attention, authority, all their honor, all their power, all dominion, I want you to give that all to the Son.

So down the hallway, as I like to illustrate it, there's the principal of the whole school, if you will. All that is, there he is the father, but the father has dispatched his son like the teacher in the classroom and he says now you serve him, you obey him.

And so our focus to the glory of God the Father according to Philipians 2 is to be focused on giving dominion and honor and glory to the son, as that passage says, bowing down before him and confessing that he is Lord. And if you're real concerned about the spirit, as they like to write books on it as the forgotten person of the Trinity, listen, he's not forgotten but I guarantee to you, if you want to pay attention to the Spirit, then the Spirit is going to direct your attention back to the Son, always. And my illustration, this isn't blasphemy, when it comes to the Trinitarian view of God, we've got the principal, if you will, who is in charge of the whole thing down the hallway. He sent his Son into the domain of the cosmos, where we live. He draws human attention to the Son and he says, now serve him and give him complete respect and if he speaks then you obey him.

And the Spirit is like the janitor, if you will. This isn't blasphemy, it is exactly the role that he plays. He comes in and says, listen, if there is anything that needs to be fixed, if there's anything that I can do to make sure that you focus on the teacher, if there's something wrong here, the projector doesn't work, if the door is squeaking, I'm going to come in and fix these things so you can keep your focus, on a laser beam focused, on Christ to give him your full attention and obedience.

He doesn't want you looking at his key ring or saying, hey, let's play with the broom. The Spirit wants you focused on the Son. The Father wants you to give glory to the Son. That brings honor to him. And I just wonder when you pray in the name of Christ, when you think of emulating the image of Christ in your life, when you read commands of Christ in the Gospels and he tells you to do something, I just wonder, do you realize that's my job to live for him. Even in creation, the physical creation of the world, it says in Colossians Chapter 1 verse 15 that he became the agency of all creation.

It says this in verse 16, "by him all things were created" speaking of Christ whether it is "in heaven on earth visible or invisible whether thrones, dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created by him and for him."

If you want to know your purpose in life, it's to live for him and to ask the question every day what is pleasing to the Lord. How can I live my summer, how can I live my Sunday, how can I live my Thursday afternoon, that pleases him? Discern that. Remember you're here to serve the king. Don't forget who we serve. This is a critical thing for us to do, to subjugate our agenda, at least make it subservient to the agenda that we purpose to bring to Christ all the way down to what we eat and drink, to quote First Corinthians 10, "Whether you eat or drink ... do all to the glory of God." And God is going to direct your attention to the obedience of Jesus Christ to all that he taught us.

"Well, this sounds like a really terrible sermon from Mother's Day, Pastor Mike."

Well it would be harsh, I suppose, if it weren't for a biblical concept that I want to remind you of. If you're regular here you know this word. The Greek New Testament gives us this word repeatedly



and it's a very good word and it's so apropos for this particular message that the rest of the world is going to say, this is so harsh, I can't imagine God would want us to think this way.

And here's the Greek word, Teleios. Have you heard me use that word before? Teleios, T-E-L-E-I-O-S, teleios is how we transliterate that word. Teleios. And I've said if I were ever writing a Greek lexicon that would define Greek words of the New Testament, next to that word I would put this: teleios, I would put this word in English: "Ahhh" because that's the idea. "Ahhh."

What does that mean? Just right. That's just right.

Translated most of the time in the Greek New Testament into English as "perfect." But perfect gives you the wrong idea. If you're thinking about "dikaios" the Greek word that righteous and exacting in terms of its moral nature, I'm not talking about that. Teleios means it's just the way it ought to be.

It's just right.

There are certain things that are just right. And when it comes to this particular mindset that seems so jarring and coarse and gruff to us, this is how it ends. You don't thank the servant because he did what was commanded. Matter of fact you ought to say when you've done everything you were commanded, "We're unworthy servants. We've only done what was our duty." That doesn't seem right. No, it is right. As a matter of fact, that's teleios right, that's so perfectly right.

That's the kind of right that if you start to understand it you can sit back and say, "Man, that's a satisfying way to live my life." That's a life well lived, that's a day well live, that's an hour well live, when I can sit back and say I brought glory to Christ by doing what he asked me to do. There's no better way to spend your hour than to invest your hour or your year or your life in doing things that he asks us to do. You can take, that's the first word in this third point, take satisfaction in fulfilling your duty.

Take it. And I mean "take." I didn't say "find" satisfaction in it. I'm not waiting for you to be passive about it, I want you to take satisfaction in it by giving mental thought and energy to saying, this is what I was created to do. Just like the wisdom of the rabbis in the Mishnah saying, when it's hard, this is the thing you were made for. Man, take satisfaction and joy in that. Don't fight it, take it. Say this is what I love doing. Paul expended his life. If anybody had a hard time doing the stuff God asked them to do, the apostle Paul talks about the cost over and over to the Corinthians but then he says this, Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 15, he says this, "I will most gladly," there is the key, "spend and be expended for your souls."

I'm dealing with the kid of the boss and the boss has told me to care for the kid and it's costing me another break, it's costing me another overtime day, it's costing me more overtime.

I'm working hard at this and it's costing me and he says I'm glad to do it. "I most gladly spend and be expended." Do you take satisfaction in working hard for Christ, in sacrificing something else for Christ? I know that it never feels good to have something that we would have otherwise enjoyed, sacrificed at the altar of serving Christ. But I guarantee you if you understand your purpose, if you see your role, if you know who you're serving, the God of the universe, those sacrifices become a joy even to the place of suffering. My wife was preaching from this platform just yesterday to our gals, that Helen Roseveare, who could say, you know what, to suffer, and here was the controlling verse for her from Philippians, to suffer, to have the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake.



I mean people don't think that way anymore. Why? Because they make a category error about who God is and who they are. And they get a little confused about who's here to serve who. We've got to recognize that even if it cost us we can find joy in this if we could just understand our purpose is to serve the king and he is God and we are not, and there's no better place to be than exactly where we should be.

The left fielder can sometimes sit there and look at all the accolades, all the camera shots, all the cheering for the pitcher on the mound and say, "Man, I wish I were the pitcher."

Until, of course, he comes in and tries to pitch and then no one wants him pitching. The pitcher should pitch and the left fielder should play left field, that's just the way it ought to be. And when it comes to the pitcher's mound, it's already filled.

Now I understand all the attention goes to the pitcher. Christ is on the mound and he is there to do what he does and all the crowd should cheer for him and so should the left fielder.

Matter of fact, it was a left fielder I think who ended up trying to usurp that place on the mound and he was cast out of heaven.

And when you sit there selling Pepsis or peanuts in the stands saying, I wish I were on the mound getting all those accolades. I wish the crowds were here for me.

And you hop over the fence and crawl through the dugout and you go down there to the pitching mound and say, "Give me that ball. I want all this glory." You're just doing what Satan tried once and that is I want to be at the center of all this. I want everybody serving me. And if you just get honest with yourself and really look through the mirror of God's word you'll find how much we echo that even as Christians who want to walk with Christ, so often we want this to be about us. I'm telling you the best thing at a stadium is when the guy selling hotdogs is selling hotdogs, when the pitcher is pitching, when the left fielder is playing left field, when the announcer is announcing, when the right person is singing the national anthem.

We need the people that are gifted to do what they are gifted to do. What they're categorically assigned to do, to do the jobs they're assigned to do, and when everybody does what they're supposed to do it's copacetic, it is teleios, it is the way it ought to be. When Paul praised the Thessalonians in First Thessalonians he said this, I'm so pleased with how you're living Christian life and I thank God everyday for you and then he says this in First Thessalonians Chapter 1 verse 3, he gives three words and they're all hard words. He talks about this: work, labor and hypomone, speaking of Greek words that you know, hypomone. That perseverance, that enduring, difficult perseverance. These are all really hard words and he says, you know, the work, the labor and that persevering endurance, I love seeing that but they're not left alone. If you know your Bible, it says this, when it comes to those three things he says, remember the work of FAITH, the labor of LOVE, the steadfastness, that's how it translates, hypomone, the hypomone of HOPE.

So these are tied to the realities of what we believe and not only believe but experience in our relationship with God. Love, faith, hope.

See, when my life is attuned to the things that are important to God all of a sudden now my work becomes an outgrowth of those things. This is not about you trying to change your life from the



outside in.

So you having these things right: faith, hope and love to where in our lives we understand what those things are. I trust in the God who empowers me. I love the God who is the king.

I am ready to hope in the fact that God knows what he's doing even when I have to deny my flesh to go the extra mile, stay the extra hour, spend the extra dollar. I know this is what God designed me to do and I'm going to work and I'm going labor and I'm going to persevere in all that labor.

He says that's the way it ought to be. And you know what, it's one of the most positive letters in the New Testament, First Thessalonians. This is a joy filled church, serving and loving and doing the hard stuff and enjoying the process just like Paul said at the end of his life in Second Timothy. At the end of his life he said I'm ready to be poured out like a drink offering. A drink offering, it's wasted, it's just in the ground and there it goes.

But it's to God. In the Old Testament, a drink offering you poured out something precious on the ground and it was gone. You gave it away for God. And he said my life is like that of a drink offering poured out. And he said this, here's the positive, I'm ready to do that. I've spent my life and I'm ready to spend it right to the end. He said I've run the race. I fought the good fight. I finished the course. Now there's the great picture of joyfully recognizing this is my duty, I'm finding satisfaction and then he blows our minds, which I think is all too common to us because we've come to expect it, Paul didn't expect it. We're told not to expect it, then he says, and a crown of righteousness is laid up for me. It's going to be lavished upon me.

And this is, if you think there's been some contradiction and there has, not in the context of Scripture in terms of what it purposes for us but certainly in terms of the image because just a few chapters back in Luke Chapter 12 we had the picture of a God who leaves his servants in charge and then he comes back and the servants who are busy working, they're alert and they're awake.

It says the master comes, he girds himself to serve like a servant and he takes the servants and has them recline at the table and he serves them. Now he asks us the question, who would do that? And we're going to say, we wouldn't do that. And yet just five chapters early he says that's what God's going to do. There's the hope. One day he will come back and reward servants and I guarantee you, Paul and anyone else who properly understood it, and I think at that point you will properly understand it, you're not going to say, "finally I get my reward for what I deserve. Finally, someone's recognizing all my sacrifice." You'll have your forehead to the ground before the king of kings as a rodent before the king of the jungle, the lion, and he'll roar and he'll say I want to serve you now and he will. That's the amazing grace of God. Now some of us have become presumptuous about the grace of God. But how good for us to sit here today to say I'll spend and be expended, I'll be a martyr if that's what it takes to serve Christ. And in the back of my mind, like the Apostle Paul, if I spill my life out like a drink offering I know that there is for me laid up a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, who should cast me into hell, will award me on that day and not only to me he says but to all who have loved his appearing.

We can't wait when we get to see the Christ that we served. And the amazing grace of God is he's going to reward us for it. But in the meantime we should be saying, we're unworthy servants. We've only done our duty. We've done what we're called to do, what we're made to do, what we're designed to do and how good when we keep our positions and do what we are called to do.



There's nothing more satisfying than that.

Now granted these four verses are not welcomed in modern 21st century evangelical places. A lot of Christian authors, a lot of churches, they don't like this at all and if you are one of our gals in our women's bible study, we did our hot topic this last week, you know how unpopular this concept of authority is when it comes to God. Of course we revealed the problem with the movie and the book known as *The Shack*. You're familiar with *The Shack*? William Paul Young wrote this book, one of the best selling books ever written, in the top 70 of all time.

One of the best selling English-written books of all time. Translated into countless languages and then came out in a movie just recently. It grossed 16 million dollars in its opening weekend. It is one of the films, in the "faith based" film category, one of the best movies ever being received and imbibed and just swallowed whole by Christians everywhere including your favorite Christian musicians.

They love this. They endorse it. They sing songs to promote it. And yet the problem with that is, I hope you learned if you're one of our gals here this week, it does the exact opposite of what this passage is trying to do and that is to calibrate the reminder that he is the king, he is in charge, he is the boss, we are the servants, we fulfill our role, we're never to climb on the pitcher's mound and say this is all about us. And yet that movie and that book is not being misinterpreted, as the author carefully clarified in his most recent book when he wrote the nonfiction theological clarification book "*Lies We Believe About God*." And a countless, I mean it's counted unfortunately, a long list that seems countless and nauseating to me to read through all the chapters, of all the things it says we all get wrong, that traditional Christianity gets wrong about God. Things like "God is good and I'm not." That he says is a huge myth of Christianity.

"God wants to be a priority in your life." That's a huge myth of Christianity. "God wants to use me." Oh, heaven forbid, he'd ever use me like a servant. No, you are a servant, an unworthy servant and I am too. That is our role. And yet this is being posited is a helpful, welcomed, new perspective, as the musicians and the critics say. This is the Pilgrim's Progress of our time. It's NOT the Pilgrim's Progress of our time. John Bunyan is rolling over in his grave, so to speak, were he to catch a whiff of this. This is the tripe of our age. This is the book of mormon of our age. This is heresy of our age. Why?

Because it takes the God who is to ever be exalted, the God who said, "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth" and says, no, he is nothing more than your cosmic buddy, your friend, your therapist, your life coach. And if you're hurting, it's not your fault, if you're struggling you shouldn't, let me help you, let me heal you, let me fix you. I understand God is a gracious God. He is a lion who cares for the rodents, if you'd like to put it that way.

But lest we forget that he is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords we need to have our minds recalibrated by passages like this to remember that he says to us as servants, keep serving, "be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing your labors not in vain." I'm quoting First Corinthians 15:58.

That needs to be our mantra. That needs to be our passion. Let me end with a simple quotation from Romans Chapter 12 verse 11. Unfortunately, when our theology is amuck, we become slothful in our zeal, even lazy. The Bible says don't be so.



You come in from the field, you're tired, I understand that. If there's more for God to lay before us then we do it. It says, "Don't be slothful in your zeal, be fervent in your spirit, serve the Lord." My reminder to you on this day is to fulfill what God has made you to be. There's nothing more gratifying. Serve the Lord.

Let's pray. God help us in a day when I think this message is needed more than ever, particularly in Western Christianity, to remind ourselves that you're a great, transcendent, majestic God, the God of hosts, the Lord of hosts, the God who rules the heavens and when the most majestic creatures you've ever made, the beings that we know of as Seraphim and Cherubim in the Bible get in your presence, they hide their face. They cry out to you, not "cool, cool, cool," or "merciful, merciful, merciful" is the Lord of hosts, they say "Holy, Holy, Holy."

Other, different, set apart, transcendent is the Lord of hosts. And God, if we were just for a moment to be ushered into that scene, that picture that Isaiah got to see, where he sees this glory filling this place in the image of your throne room and after going to great lengths to atone for our sin and clearly that was a pre-Christian picture of what would happen on the cross that you would go to great lengths to take our sins away. But after that, as the Godhead cries out, "who's going to go for us, who are we going to send," that we like Isaiah without missing a beat would raise our hand, would stand up and say, "here am I, send me." Not "what's in it for me" and "how hard is it" and "let me see what it would take" and "would it mean another night out this week?" And "I don't know, would I lose friends over it?" Let us be more like Isaiah this week and say, "here am I, send me" There's a need.

Whether it begins with the immediate context of this passage to forgive someone in our heart, to not be a temptation to sin in someone else's life, to see the sin in our lives as something that needs to be eradicated taking temptation seriously, whether it's stepping up to serve, to evangelize, to do something that advances the kingdom this week in our lives, we pray we would do it without any kind of hesitation. So God may this whole auditorium be filled with hundreds of people that would say, "here am I, send me." You're a great God, you're a mighty God. Let us see that afresh today.

In Jesus name, Amen.