

**No Greater Love-Part 9**  
**Salvation in Perspective**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Yeah. Yep. Yes. I know. I know! I know. I know that you noticed I'm wearing glasses. You see those. I get it. Unless you're on the radio, if you're listening on the radio, I guess I just outed myself. Yes! I'm wearing glasses now because I, like you, a lot of you at least, my eyes are not what they used to be, or so my optometrist tells me. I have a good optometrist thankfully, Dr. Nota, actually is part of our church and he loves this church enough to try to make sure that your pastor can see well enough to study every week and to preach, among other things, those are the things he cares about making sure I can do. And so I had my appointment, went down there, he slammed me in the chair, and a chart on the wall, and he brings that big contraption over on the arm that swings in front of you, it looks like you're in a sci-fi movie, you know, BAM. It's called phoropter. Did you know that? A phoropter, sometimes they called a refractor. But it's the thing that helps you figure out what your prescription is. Now what's so weird about that is you can be looking through that and you can see the eye chart there, and with a few little click, click, clicks everything on the wall just melts into like black spaghetti on the wall. Like you can't see anything. Then they start click, click, clicking, and then they start asking, you know, the questions you've been through all those times, like, "This one or this one? This or this, A or B, one or two?" You go through all of that stuff and everything keeps getting sharper and sharper. All that ink stuff on the wall, all those blotches, become nice crisp letters. I love that. Right? That's a beautiful thing and you realize the world looks a lot sharper than you ever thought it did and it's good. It's a kind of process, that click, click, click, clear vision kind of thing that I hope this sermon this morning will do for you.

This passage has the ability to bring things into sharp focus for you. So if you haven't grabbed your Bible yet, grab your Bibles, turn to Luke Chapter 23. We're going to cover 6 verses this morning, verses 26 through 31. And I want you and I to look at this text with the hope, here's my prayer, that it will get things both near and far, both near and far, into sharp focus. Notice the subtitle of the message this morning. Right? "Getting Our Salvation in Perspective." That's the big picture, salvation. But more than that, our society is a big part of it and our Savior, of course, is a part of it. Getting Christ and our world and this thing called salvation, who we are, getting all of that into sharp focus, all because we're in a passage that is telling us in some very poignant terms and a very pain section of Scripture, the crucifixion of Christ, at least the preliminary part of it. We've been through the trials, he's been beaten, he's been whipped, we have all the mocking and jeering going on, but now he's being led through the streets of Jerusalem having to carry his cross and not capable, apparently, of carrying his cross and someone being conscripted to carry it for him.

So let's look at these verses. I'm going to read them for you, verses 26 through 31 of the 23rd Chapter of Luke. Follow along as I read it from the English Standard Version. It starts this way. "And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them," here comes an amazing, jaw-dropping, how in the world would we think he would respond this way. Here is an unexpected response of candor and great sting. Look at it, here comes. "Hey, daughters of Jerusalem," I mean you're watching this horrific execution that's unfolding before you, "don't weep for me," don't weep for me, "weep for yourselves," weep for yourselves, "and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' For they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it

is dry?"

Now there is a verse you didn't learn in Awana right there, verse 31. Right? Because you would have gone home to your parents and said, "What does that mean?" They'd go, "I don't know. Ask the pastor." Well, let's ask the pastor. What in the world are we talking about there? Matter of fact, that is such an important proverbial statement that is summarizing all that we're dealing with in this context of Jesus turning their pity back on them, that we should start there. Notice on the worksheet if you pulled that out or you downloaded it electronically, it's available every Friday afternoon as you get ready for the weekend sermon, you'll see that I've taken the verses and I want to start at the bottom and then we'll go back up to the top.

Let's start at the bottom, because in this proverb that is, as some commentators have rightly said, it is purposefully ambiguous. Not because God is trying to be mysterious here with us, it's because it applies at several different levels. Let's think of three. I mean there are 20 different ways you could try to look at this, but three that I think would be reasonable, that if we sat here for hours and tried to figure out what's going on in the context, what could this proverb possibly mean, let's just deal with three of them that I think might be helpful for us. And then at the end, be able to say, "Well, I see how they all three apply."

Now let's start with this. Let's read it again. Verse 31. "For, if they..." and the first time I'm going to raise my hand there and go, who is "they"? Right? "Do these things..." I'm thinking again, another question, what "things"? So I need to know what we're talking about and we know who's doing it. Right? "When the wood is green..." and now a third question, who's the "wood" and what are we talking about, green wood, and "what will happen when it's dry?" Okay. Well, okay. Wood, green, dry. Let's start at the very, very bottom. Dry wood, green wood, let's think about the difference there. Now, I know we're not agrarian, right, we're suburbanites, but if you think about even building a fire in a fireplace or going camping, what you don't want is green wood, don't want green wood because it doesn't burn well. You need dry wood, you want to dry out your firewood. So we know that.

And if there is ever something that looks like the fire of something bad that's happening, it's what they're seeing unfold before their eyes. We're seeing this man crucified. I mean that's a horrific, fiery scene if you will. So we know this: that the distinction that's being made is between something that burns well and something that doesn't burn well. And he's saying now, let's just make this, I don't think it's a big leap, that he is the green wood. Right? "If they do these things when the wood is green," so something happening to him, the green wood, the innocent, the hard to burn. Right? Then "What's going to happen when the wood is dry?" Easy to burn. I mean, kindling, it will burn up quick, it's really dry and ready to burn. OK. So the contrast is being made between him and the crowds. Right? "Don't weep for me, weep for yourself." I'm the green wood, you're the dry wood. OK? Well, what are "these things"? Well, these things, even by the analogy, is some kind of burning, some kind of bad thing. Well, the bad thing happening to him is what? Crucifixion.

Three ways we can understand this. Let's start with this. The Romans are crucifying them in a Roman way, the Roman execution rack. And here's what he's already said coming into the city of Jerusalem. The Romans are going to encircle this city and destroy it. There will not be one stone left upon the other, even in this temple, it's going to be decimated. And he's already said, I'm worried for you. Matter of fact, it to be good when all this happens if none of you are pregnant or nursing, it's not going to be good. So we know this: that there's a kind of judgment, "these things" is the wrath of the Romans. We could look at it that way. There's one way to look at it. He says, "Look

what the Romans are doing to me and I'm innocent, I'm hard for people to be angry at, really. You can be angry at me for wrong reasons but it's hard for you to be rightly angry at me. If the Romans are venting their anger at me, their wrath at me, their fire at me, what are they going to do to you, the dry wood, which they got plenty of reasons not to like you rebellious people?" And of course, if you know anything about the history of Israel, there was an uprising, a revolt by the Jewish people that led to the response of Titus the general and his armies and they pushed them back and they went through a few phases of this. And then in the end, as you know, I know you know this from history, in 70 A.D. they decimated the city.

So you have a Roman response of anger and fury against Christ the green wood and then the Roman response to the people of Jerusalem as he puts it in verse number 28, the daughters of Jerusalem, the people of Jerusalem, and he says, wow, it's going to be really bad. Well this is in the 30s, probably 33 A.D., and this is going to happen in 70 A.D., and again it even says there, "Weep for yourselves and your children." A lot of the people there might not even be alive in 70 A.D., but some of them would and their kids would be. And the kids at that point would wish they weren't even alive. They'd wish that they, as it says, they will say, "It would be great if I wasn't even born," which is an ancient Near Eastern or even a modern way of saying, "I'm really suffering. This is so bad. I wish I weren't here for that." So it could be, view number one, "The Romans, look what they're doing to me. Look what the Romans will do to you. And they're really going to unleash on you."

Secondly, the people, "they" in verse 31, could be the Jewish people. Now think this through. The Jewish Sanhedrin were really the push behind the Romans executing Christ. As Pilate said he didn't even want to crucify Christ. He didn't want to have him crucified. He knows it's because of envy and jealousy that they're delivering him over. They already had the Sanhedrin, the ruling Supreme Court of Israel. They were the ones pushing this all. I mean it was the temple priest and the guards and the elders of the city who were coming to Jerusalem, and even in the Garden to arrest them, and bring him to Pilate, only by necessity Herod and Pilate, were really pawns, in a sense, of the hatred that the Jewish leaders had for Jesus.

So, you could say, "For if they," the Jewish leaders, "do these things," have me crucified and I'm an innocent person here, "what will happen when it is dry?" Now, we take the "they" and say, this is what we call a circumlocution in rhetoric. We're leaving out the subject, I think purposely, but perhaps this is in reference to God. In other words, "What will God do to Israel, and all the leaders of Israel, and the people of Israel, and the capital city of Jerusalem when the leaders of Israel killed me?" So, view number one: the Romans are executing me, wait till the Romans get at this city. Number two: the Jewish leaders, they're the ones having me crucified, via the Romans, what's going to happen when God responds to that? And again, I think you could say the one thing that is clear in terms of the pinnacle of that kind of response to Israel, not that they're down and out, they are broken off though it says in Romans 11, well that came to a head in 70 A.D. In 70 A.D. the city was destroyed. We haven't had, until recently, even a recognized state of Israel until our generation. So it could be that in this passage we've got two "theys". Right? In other words, "they" the Jewish officials are having you crucified. Wait till God responds to that and deals with Israel.

Thirdly. "For if they do these things," when I speak about "they" in this passage, I'm just talking about the people, the crowds, the mobs, the leaders, the Romans, everyone. "If these things happen," because sinful people are having an innocent person crucified, the green wood, "what's going to happen when it's dry?" Let's flip it around and not think about 70 A.D., but when God responds in the biggest possible way. Now the words there you saw in verse 30, when they begin to say that the mountains fall on us and the hills cover us, that came from Hosea. If you have a study

Bible or reference Bible I'm sure it takes you back to Hosea, when the Assyrians were coming in to destroy the northern tribes of Israel, and the prediction was through Hosea, they're going to be saying, "I wish we would just die. And I wish the hills would fall on us. I wish the mountains would cover us."

Well twice now in the middle of the 90s A.D., here was the Spirit moving John on the island of Patmos to write the book of Revelation and he employs that phrase twice. Right? This is 20 years, at least, after the destruction of Jerusalem and he employs that same verbiage about what's going to happen. That is that the people are going to say, "We want the mountains to fall on us. We want the hills to fall on us." He quotes that Hosea passage, at least alludes to it twice, and he's not talking about the end of Jerusalem in the first century. He's talking about all these events, starting in Chapter 6 is the first time in Revelation he mentions this, and it says when God's wrath starts to be unleashed on the nations, on the world and then people will say, "I want the mountains to fall on us. I want the hills to destroy us." God's wrath is being poured out, not on a city for a generational issue of Jesus being crucified, but on the whole world. If this is God now, that through the people is bringing the Lamb of God to a place of sacrifice, if that's what's happening here, he's the Lamb of God now being made a guilt offering, then what's going to happen when God, for all the impenitent out there, turns and brings his wrath upon the world. And as it says in Revelation 6, they'll want to die but death will elude them. It is going to be terrible for the great day of God's wrath and the "wrath of the Lamb" have come. That picture of God now judging the world.

Now, I think those are the three most reasonable ways to look at this and I do think it's purposefully ambiguous because if you're in the immediate audience you're going to say, I've heard Jesus talk about the destruction of Jerusalem and it wouldn't take but about 40 years for them to realize this is what Jesus was talking about. But then you'd recognize in the Bible, just like we had with a lot of prophecies, there's more to this than just that. There's a coming fulfillment of that. And John talks about that, driven by the Spirit, and I recognize that the first two all end in 70 A.D. as the immediate application, but the third one is a general principle that applies today.

All that to say and that was a lot of verbiage for a Sunday morning, but if you followed any of that, I think the one thing that's certainly going to apply is the fact that we look around in our world and no one's afraid of the Romans destroying our city, not the Roman Romans. You know, I can't talk to anybody in that generation about their kids. No. But I can talk in a general way about the way the book of Revelation talks and that is that because of our sin, if we're impenitent, God is going to judge the world, and put it in terms of Romans 2, that people without Christ "are storing up for themselves wrath," God's wrath, judgment, like fire, "for the day of God's judgment." That is a problem. And that's a problem that will lead me to really what he's concerned about in this passage and that is, "Don't pity me, pity yourselves, pity the people around you."

And you're going, "Oh, I'm so glad I'm a Christian. I'm so glad. I got mine. No condemnation for those in Christ," and I'm going to go, "Yeah, that's good. That's what we want." But unless you live in the New Jerusalem or you're in the presence of God right now, you're surrounded by people who aren't saved. Am I right? Right? You all are surrounded by people who are not safe.

And when you look at a world that is lost and a world that really is headed toward that destruction, when one day they'll say, "I wish we could die," but death will elude them and the ultimate expression of that, which is a place the Bible says where the worm does not die, where they are tormented in God's judgment. And it won't just last for a temporal period but for an eternity. The Bible says, you ought to be concerned for them. Matter of fact, you ought to have a sincere concern

or a pity for them. They are pitying Jesus, he flips that on its head, he goes there's a lot of dry wood out there that's going to be burned up with the coming judgment of God. That doesn't sound like New Testament Jesus-loves-you theology, but it is biblical theology, it's true, and the whole point of Jesus loving you is to keep you from that coming judgment. The whole book of Revelation is about that coming judgment. And it's not going to stop on this earth, it's going to continue on.

Number one, if you're taking notes, you might want to put all that verbiage into this one line. You ought to "Sincerely Pity the World." You should sincerely pity the world. Don't pity Christ. Right? And Christ said that even if you would pity me as an innocent victim of a Roman execution, you ought to pity the lost people of the world. And I'm telling you this, I can't pity people who already died and 70 A.D., but I can pity people in the 21st century who tell me that my Christianity is nonsense and that we're a bunch of duds and we're living this Christian life and they feel bad for us.

As a matter of fact, let's talk about that for a second. They feel bad for us don't they? Don't they? Drop my occupation on someone the next time you're out playing golf or doing whatever you're doing. "Hey, what do you do for a living?" Right? I have to tell them, "Well, I'm a pastor," and they go, "Ohhhhhh". It's bad enough that you have to admit you're a Christian. I have to admit I'm a professional Christian. Right? I do this for a living. There are like, "Oh, that must be awful," you know, that's what their face says. Then they don't know what to say. They usually say, "Well, I'm sorry for the words I said earlier in the conversation." Right? That's usually the next thing they say. But they feel pity for me. Right?

And you know what, that's biblical. What? No, it's biblical. You know why? Because you know what they see in my life, I hope? That is I'm fighting a lot of things, a lot of things that they give way to that to them seems like fun and freedom and licentiousness and they look at me and say, "You're a fuddy-duddy. You keep the rules. You got to deny yourself all the time. You live by this strict code. Man, I wouldn't want to be you." And I get that. Matter of fact, First Corinthians Chapter 15, Paul said it this way, "If we had hoped in Christ in this life only, we're to be pitied more than all people." And you're right. If this life of self-denial, mortifying the flesh, saying no to temptation, not going along with the system of this world, saying, "I am not about self-promotion, I'm about the promotion of Christ, I'm going to sacrifice, I'm going to give, I'm going to live my life for Christ," and the world won't understand that. If that's all there is to this and we die and they die and we have the same eternity, you ought to pity us. You ought to pity us.

Matter of fact, a few chapters earlier in First Corinthians 4 Paul said this: "We are considered the scum of the world and the refuse of all things." That came in a passage where people were sitting there thinking, "You know, I don't like the Apostle Paul because he's really not living up to our hype about a real good Christian leader here. We need better, more successful Christian leaders who have the worldly definitions of success." And he says, "You guys have become kings, have you, really, and that without us?" Well, wait a minute, we're the apostles. I think you have what we often called an over-realized eschatology. That means the eschatological truths of what's coming, you believe those. The problem is you think you all have them now. Matter of fact, that would be a good book title for heresy, "Your Best Life Now." Right? "That would be a good title for that because that's not biblical Christianity. Right? That is not. The Bible makes it clear, here's biblical Christianity, and it won't sell a lot of books. "Scum of the World, Refuse of All Things." Right? By Mike Fabarez. There you go. That book is going to sell.

No, it won't sell. Why? Because I don't want that. I want success. I want all the things the world says I should have. I should have fun, I should have a blast, I should be having a great time and a



wonderful life and all of that. And the reality is: no, you know what? We're not exempt from evil. We have bad things happen to us. You and I get cancer. Matter of fact, we lose relationships often because of our relationship with Christ. We lose being part of the boys club at work because we won't go along with it. We won't lie, we won't cheat, we won't steal, we're fighting temptation from the inside, from the outside, from the pressure of our culture. Man, it's a rough way to live. And yet Jesus turns around and says, "Don't pity me. Pity yourself."

It doesn't matter how circumspect I live my life, it doesn't matter how self-sacrificing I might be, it doesn't matter how hard I work to follow Christ. When it comes down to it what matters is where you and I are 100 years from now. That's what matters. And you're not going to pity me if I sacrifice to follow Christ. And as Christ said he came and said, you know what, even because of me the members of your own household will be your enemies. It will not matter. You shouldn't pity me for my Christianity cramping my style. You ought to pity the one who is lost. Sincerely pity the world.

I don't have time to go through Psalm 73. I wish I did. I put it on your homework assignment on the back of the worksheet. Psalm 73 is the temptation we have to envy the world. We're envious of them because of their fun, their freedom, all the things they get to do, and all the self-sacrifice that we have to have and it's no fair. As he says, "I'm envy envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." "For me, I've kept my hands clean for nothing." Well, he goes on to say, "I thought that way until I entered the sanctuary of God and I discerned their end." I need a vision that goes beyond the horizon of this world. You're right, my life might not be as "fun" or self-indulgent as my non-Christian counterpart. I understand that, that's great. Because I'm living in a sinful world and sinful body and sinful society with a sinful tempter, but at the end, see, everything changes. I recognize that where you're headed is a bad, bad situation.

It ought to do three things at least for me. Before we leave this first point, number one, it ought to motivate me for evangelism. Ought to motivate me for evangelism. The last few verses of Matthew Chapter 9, Jesus is there, he sees the people, he sees the crowd and he says this: that he feels that "they are sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless." The Bible starts with this, "He felt compassion for them." That's the word pity. He felt pity for them. "They're sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless." And then he said this, the very next thing Jesus said. He said you need to beseech, or beg, the Lord, ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers into the harvest. We've got to snatch a few of these wandering sheep and bring them to the Shepherd of their souls. We've got to save them. We need to be motivated. Do you pity non-Christians? You should. Not in some overt dramatic way. I'm not asking you to insult them, but in your heart you ought to be like the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 and 10 and you say I have anguish in my heart over them. They're lost. You feel that? We ought to. And it ought to motivate our evangelism.

Fanny Crosby wrote those great words of that hymn, "Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying, Snatch them in pity," there's our word, "from sin and the grave; Weep o'er the erring one, Lift up the fallen, Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save." You say, "Well, I might lose a relationship." Yeah you might. "They'll think I'm weird." Yep, they might think you're weird. They probably will. And if 99 people think you're a weirdo and crazy and jamming your religion down their throat, the 100th one is going to turn from their sin, there's going to be a party in heaven, another name is going to be written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and you're going to meet them 100 years from now in the eternal dwellings, and you're going to say, "I'm glad I sacrificed my reputation and was counted as a Jesus freak so that you and I could be here together in eternity. I pity those people who had good reputations and ended up going to hell." Pity them. It will be a motivation for evangelism.

Pity them.

Number two. This is not number two in your outlines, this is the second implication of number one, because it gets life's pains in perspective. It gets life's pains in perspective. We're supposed to be thankful this week. Be thankful. Thankful, thankful, thankful. "Ah, my life stinks, man. I got a lot of bad things. There is stuff that sucks in my life. I hate it." Really? Well here's the thing. Jot this reference down, Matthew Chapter 18 verses 8 and 9. Your life is that bad, Christian? Here's what the Bible says. It could be because you're not exempt from suffering, from pain, from illness, from loss, from whatever it is you're going through, unemployment, problems, death in your family, whatever it is. Here's what the Bible says. "Better for you..." This is a statement about us saying no to sin and being ruthless about temptation. "Better for you," let me quote it, "to enter life crippled or lame..." Want to talk about disadvantages in this world? It's not going to make the cover of some Christian bestselling book. Right? Better for you to go through all of that and have all of that pain than to go into the next life "with two hands and two feet and then be thrown into the fire." Oh, I missed a word there. "The eternal fire." Oh, that would be terrible.

How about this, next verse. "If your eye causes you sin, tear it out." Why? "Because it would be better for you to enter life with one eye," and a patch over your other eye, "than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the fire of hell." All I'm saying is this: you and I suffer a lot of things, I get that. The world can be a bad place for Christians to be, and you and I can suffer, but it'll get all that in perspective to know this: that the real problem would be those who end up on the other side of this, and they hear, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

Gives us a healthy view and fear of God. That's the third thing I jotted down and there are lots of things we could say about this. But Hebrews Chapter 12, it was in our Daily Bible Reading, that was the reason it made my list this week, and I thought about the fact that I pity the world, I should care about them, they're dry wood, they're about to be kindled, this is a thing that's going to be bad on this world. And I thought to myself, when I think that way, just like I see spelled out in Hebrews Chapter 12 verses 25 through 29, I think to myself that consuming fire that is going to consume his enemies, it makes me grateful, in a humble, fearful, adoring, awe-stricken way before God. He's going to shake everything that can be shaken but, therefore, he says, to quote the punch line, "We are grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and therefore we should offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, because our God is a consuming fire."

Pity the lost. Jesus did. Its motivation for our evangelism this week. It gets our pains in perspective and it will certainly provide us a healthy fear of God and that's a solution to a million things in the Christian life is a man or a woman who fears the Lord.

Go back to the top of the passage now. Luke 23 verse 26. The context of this is he's being led away to be crucified. "They seized one, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and they laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus." They laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus. So you're telling me this guy is following Jesus carrying a cross. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Does that sound familiar? Twice already in Luke, Luke has inscribed those words as the teaching of Jesus. "You want to be on my team? Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow me." And now, do you think it's a mistake that this historical narrative is worded for us in that way? Simon is actually physically called out of the crowd to step out from every other relationship he's got, to say, "You, you," probably at the tip of a Roman spear, "hey you, mister. You get in here, take up the cross, follow Jesus."

Now I understand that's the historical situation and to exegete the passage, we look and kind of figure out historically what's going on. But we'd be a really dense preacher not to make the connection of that's exactly what is being called upon in our lives for us to do if we want to be on God's team. We step out of the crowd and we follow Christ. We're willing to take up the cross and follow Christ. That's a symbol, I know. I can't tell you to follow Christ because he's not in South Orange County and you don't know what street is going down. So you cannot physically follow him. We're not talking about following him physically. We're talking about opening up his Word, understanding what it is to be a Christian, allowing the prompting convictions of the Spirit and the principles of God's Word to lead me every day.

Cross? No cross. I'm not going put a piece of lumber over your shoulder. What is that about? Where do you sign up to get one of these wooden crosses? You don't get a wooden cross. What is this about? It's about me saying, I'm willing to step out of the crowd and be jeered at, to have people hate me and exclude me and say all kinds of evil against me because I'm following with him. As Simeon said on the Temple Mount at the beginning of the book of Luke, Jesus is a sign to be opposed. Go stand with that sign. Hey, guess what? Simon of Cyrene, you're going to be spit upon. Why? Because you're associating now with him. You're going to walk through this terrible, humiliating, shameful parade and people are going to jeer at you. Oh, they're really jeering at him, but they're going to jeer at you as follow behind carrying a cross. This is going to be very uncomfortable.

Number two on your outline, jot it down that way, you need to "Step Out to Follow Christ." Of course, I mean that, in an illustrative, symbolic, poetic sense. I want you to do what God has asked you to do. I want you to be a Christian and be unashamed of it. And you follow him. And you're going to have some spit that was aimed at Christ and it's going to hit you. You are going to have people jeering at Christ and it's going to be at you. It's the Barron Trump thing. Right? Why do they hate Barron Trump? Why? He has never written any position papers, I don't hear him giving any press conferences, I don't know his position on anything, I've never heard him spout a political view. But they hate him simply because he's associated with someone the people hate. Right? And you and I are called to step out and follow Christ in this world. They don't like the Christ of the Bible.

He is, as they readily admit, he's going to cramp your style, he doesn't let you lead your life by yourself, he's going to tell you to deny sin, he's going to tell you to be this thinker who goes against the grain of culture. Yeah, you're going to be a Christian, you're going to be that. Well, you're going to have to put up with the difficulties that come with it.

Several different kinds of crosses that the Romans like to execute people on. The simple cross is not even a cross, at least in the thinking of our mind, it was a stake. They put a lot of people on stakes to kill them. The Romans used that, so did Phoenicians and others, and they would put people on a stake. Nero, of course, in 64 A.D., a lot of that going on. It's not what Christ is crucified on. Some people would suggest that. Two other kinds, there was an X-cross the Romans used to crucify people on. They'd put it in the ground like an X you would see like the palm trees that are at In-N-Out Burger. That's not a good analogy, sorry, but you know what I mean, just crossed like that. They would pin the four limbs of the person on that cross and stick them in an X. They called it the St. Andrew's cross sometimes.

Then there's what they call the Tao cross, which in Greek is a "T", it's like a capital "T" in our Latin language, and that's a stake with a crossbeam, a horizontal crossbeam. And sometimes they would



have those in place where they're going to crucify and then they would put this beam that was about eight or nine feet, weighed roughly, they estimate, between 80 and 100 pounds, and they put it on your shoulders, in this case, after they beat him and whipped him and have him carry it through town. Sometimes they would have someone else carry the other part, the vertical piece, and so sometimes there was two pieces to this and maybe that's what's going on here. Christ is carrying his cross, now you carry your cross, which is part of his cross and you carry it through town.

Or maybe it's what they call a Latin cross, which is the small case "t", which is the traditional view of what you're use to seeing as the cross and some people think that because they put the sign above his head. Right? It said it's the King of the Jews in those languages and so they think maybe that was it, they could have done it with a Tao cross. Nevertheless, we don't know exactly what the cross looked like. And we don't know if it was being carried in two pieces. We don't know and it's never said that he collapses and can't carry it. I know that's what the hymn writers and poets say, but we just know for some reason there is a guy that is conscripted to carry it. So, Christ is either carrying his part of the cross or he's not carrying any part of the cross because he can't carry it physically after his beating. Nevertheless, here is Simon of Cyrene, which is down in Africa, it's modern-day Libya. It's a place we find as someone from in the book of Acts.

But in this passage Simon is forced to carry part of this cross, which, of course, I've already made that comparison. I want to see myself in the sandals of Simon. And you think, well it's interesting that he's named and it is interesting. It's interesting that he's named. Whenever you see someone named in Scripture and there's a lot of unnamed characters in the Bible, you think, well that's important. Let me have you a jot this down if you're taking notes. Mark Chapter 15 verse 21. Mark goes even further. Not only does he give us the name but he tells us in that passage, I'll just read it for you, "They compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry Jesus' cross." Why do we need to know his kids? What's that all about? We're not living in 21st century America. We don't always have to talk about your children. Right? No, no, they wrote it down for a reason. Why?

Apparently the audience, and as this was written, there was a sense in which Mark knew this would be someone you would know. Let's just make it clear. It's not just that Simon, it's this Simon and his kids are Alex and Rufus, so let's just make clear who we're talking about here. Well if you jotted down Mark 15, now jot down Romans Chapter 16 verse 13. Romans 16:13. It's the only other time we have the word Rufus in the Bible and here's how Paul describes him. Paul lists several people, almost 40 people, I think, are listed in Romans 16. One of them is Rufus and here's what he says, verse 13. He says, "Greet Rufus," talking about the Church of Rome now, "chosen in the Lord; also his mother." If this is the same Rufus that means the mother who he is now greeting is Simon's wife, Simon of Cyrene. He says, "Who's been a mother to me as well."

In the early church it seems that they knew who Rufus was. They knew who Alexander was. And they knew who Simon was. Apparently Simon, and again it's just conjecture, but it seems like this was named and it makes sense that it was named because he was someone the church in the first century knew. And Paul says, "I know Rufus. Matter of fact, his mom was like a mom to me. When I had a need, I mean she was doting on me like a mother as I traveled around," or whatever it is. Whenever he was cross the path, she's baking him cookies or whatever. I don't know. She's being kind and caregiving to the Apostle Paul. It seems like this is more than just a historical figure who is called in to carry the cross. But this guy is not only a template of physically carrying a cross but it seemed like he stepped out of the crowd and spiritually carried his cross and was counted with Christ, at least in this passage, if it's the same guy, his son and his mother are saved.

Step out to follow Christ. It seems so random but, of course, I'm trying to tell you it's not random. It's not random. I doubt he was a follower of Christ at this point. He just came in from Africa. Right? He didn't know this, he just comes in. Why? Because it's the festival, it's the feast of Passover, and you come if you're a devoted Old Testament saint and you come to Jerusalem. Well, he comes in, he gets past the country, if you will, the outside part, probably coming through Bethany and down the Kidron Valley and across past the Garden of Gethsemane, and he comes in and he finds this commotion and a crucifixion going on. All of a sudden this big hairy knuckled Roman soldier says, "You go and take this cross and follow that criminal." It seems so random. It's not random. Neither is your beckoning call to follow Christ. It's not random.

I don't know if we have time for this but, at least, let me quote for you something that makes you sit here today knowing that the finger in your chest is given to you by a design and plan of God. Ephesians Chapter 1. I love this verse, it's so helpful, verses 4 and 5, that "God chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be," set apart, "holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us to adoption to himself as sons through Christ Jesus according to the purpose of his will." I know it feels like you got plucked out of the non-Christian crowd like a random event. It's not a random event. And it wasn't the tip of a Roman spear that got you saved. But it kind of felt like that didn't it?

I mean, I understand, I mean God is working in us, the effectual call of Christ is something that works within us and it gets my will to cooperate, I get that. God changes who I am, I understand that. But as I tell my story of me becoming a Christian, probably you and your story, at some point a lot of people can identify with this, I was 18-years-old when I became a Christian and I felt like the Spirit of God just wrestled me to the mat. I mean, that's always been the way I've talked about getting saved. I mean, it was like someone was driving at me, no human being, but God was pushing and I just remember dropping to my knees and crying out on that Friday evening, "God, I just... I'm done fighting you." I mean it's probably an illustration because I used to wrestle in high school. I wasn't very good. That's why I knew the feeling of being pinned to the mat. That was a frequent experience for me. But, I thought to myself, "I don't know if I can do anything but. The pressure, God, I got to become a Christian today or I'm done. I can't fight you anymore." That picture of God drawing you, choosing you, putting you in place.

See yourself in Simon's sandals, and then recognize this: if Simon actually was that person who gets praised and his family, maybe he's dead by the time Paul writes Romans 16, but, man, his family now is saved. You've got to know this. It is so worth it. If you're called out of the crowd to have the shame and the derision, to be hated for Christ's sake in this world, whether it's small or big or one day it turns into persecution and you lose your life for it, it is so worth it because when Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me," here's the next thing he said. He said, "For what would it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

I mean really, what good would it do for you not to step out of the crowd. You want to be a part of that group? You really want to be a part of that group that you should rightly pity? No, you don't want to be part of that. So step out of the crowd and follow Christ. "We're all Christians here. Would you knock it off, Pastor Mike?" Listen, I know that you're a Christian. Most of you, I would hope, you have a real testimony and you're Christians. But I just wonder if everyone around you at work knows that. Do your neighbors on all sides know that?

I mean, are you out from the foxhole and you're really above the radar and people know that you are

saved, that you are someone who they know that you're into God and it's more than a bumper sticker on your car, that you are someone who cares about Christ. I mean it's time for us to go public. Step out. Follow Christ. All the pain and the derision and the sacrifice of Christ's followers is worth it. I'm quoting from Luke Chapter 9 when he said, "Follow me." And then he said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world?" And then he says this, next verse, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, I'll be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." This gets everything in perspective.

You want to step out and follow a condemned criminal down the Via Dolorosa to a place where he's going to get crucified called Golgotha? You want to do that? Well here's the bottom line: man, you're not following a suffering servant. Oh, he's suffering at that particular point in biblical history, but he's the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is not someone who you should pity because he's a poor victim. No, he's the willing Lamb of God giving his life to save people. He knows this: that beyond the cross is something that he said just before he went to the cross. He prayed in John 17, he said, "Father, restore to me the glory that I had even before the world was created."

"I know where I'm going." To put it in terms of Hebrews Chapter 12, he said, here's what the Bible says, "For the joy set before Christ he endured the cross, despising its shame." I'm going to look past the shame. Right? And now he's "seated at the right hand of the Father." He sees beyond this.

Let's just close with this, verses 27 and 28. "This great multitude followed of men and women, they were mourning and lamenting, and he says, 'Daughters of Jerusalem,'" five words, "'do not weep for me.'" Now this is a bad scene for him but it's far worse for you. Weep for yourself. We've dealt with that but don't weep for me. Why should you not weep for Christ? Because when he was going to the cross, according to Hebrews 12, "for the joy set before him."

Turn to one last passage with me. Go to Philippians Chapter 2 real quick. Philippians 2. Most commentators and biblical scholars will say this was probably an ancient hymn that was sung in the church that Paul, by inspiration of the Spirit, by the direction of God's Spirit, he encodes and codifies in this text for all time. But it was something that probably was sung or used in worship and it's a great Christological passage that tells us about Christ. But look carefully at it, understanding that he's about to go to a crucifixion that was designed and reserved for Roman slaves. Right? Romans did not crucify their own citizens. It was for the worst of the worst in their society.

Look at Philippians 2, start in verse 7, just jump in the middle of this. "But he," Christ, "emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave," of a servant, "doulos", of a slave. Well he did take the form of a slave because he's about to be killed as a slave. "And being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself." I know that's a nice Christian virtue, the word humble. Would you like to be humble? I'd like to be humble. How about this? Would you like to be humiliated? I bet you'd say no to that. Right? "I don't want to be humiliated, I just want to be humbled." Get this word in your mind. And all the Renaissance paintings, as I often say of Jesus there, had a nice little loincloth nicely draping his privates as he hung on the cross. None of that. He's being dragged through the town, even in Gibson's movie, *Passion of the Christ*, he's, trust me, completely naked. That's how they crucified Roman slaves. Completely, the slaves of the Romans, naked. Humiliating. He's already been beaten, you could hardly recognize him, he's got a crown of thorns on his head, he's had his back flayed open with a cat-of-nine-tails, he's carrying a cross, can't do it, or at least part of the cross, that someone else has to carry and it is completely humiliating. Then his naked body is going to be hoisted up on this stake and he's going to be crucified.

Talk about a slave's death. That's the slave's death. But he was "obedient," Joyfully obedient I might add, according to Hebrews 12, "to the point of death, even death on a cross," a humiliating death on a cross. Let me tell you the joy, here it was, verse 9, "Therefore," and he knew this was coming, he prayed it right before he went to the cross, "God," this is a great Greek word, "highly exalted him," super-exalted him, "and bestowed on him the name," the reputation, the title, the appellation, the thing that makes him who he... I mean, this representation of his character, "made his name above every name." As they spit on this one, don't pity him, he's about to get the name that is above every name. The name that he had before his incarnation, the name that he had before the creation of the world. "So at the name of Jesus," as everyone gets vindicated, everyone we get to see, Christ now, the name of Jesus, "every single knee should bow," every knobby, hairy kneecap of every single Roman soldier, including Simon of Cyrene, bowing down and recognizing this. "Whether they're in heaven, earth," or under God's judgment, verse 11, "and every tongue will," say it, they'll agree, "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," coming with the glory of the Son, of the Father and the glorious angels. That's an amazing picture. And then it ends this way. Right? But that all will be to the glory of God the Father. Jesus Christ is Lord and the Father will stand up and say, "That's it." Jesus says don't weep for me. Yes, I'm dying a humiliating death of a slave, but it doesn't end here for me.

Number three on your outline, it would good for us to think in those terms. "Anticipate the Exalted Christ." He's coming back. He exists in a glorified form right now. I know you don't see it a lot in the Gospels, except for one passage. You don't see it a lot in the Gospel, except for one passage. It's called the transfiguration, when he's presented to us as he peels back his humanity and the humbleness of just being in human likeness. But now, as a human being, he's got a glorified body and the Bible says one day he's going to take his power and he's going to exercise that power on you, if you're his child, and he's going to transform your body to be like his glorious body. And then, guess what, no one is going to pity you then. No one is going to think, "What a life of self-sacrifice, you're a Jesus freak. You got to go to church on Sunday. They make you give money there. That's terrible." None of that's going to be happening.

That whole point about Jesus enduring the cross and despising the shame gets around to its application by saying, you and I, let's run our race with endurance, the race that's set before us. Hebrews verse 3 says, "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." You and I are going to get out there in the world this week and be Christians. You've got to understand. You've got to understand the Christ that you serve, he's not a gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Ask John about it. In the mid-90s as an old, old man, he sat on the island of Patmos and Jesus physically showed up and he described him as having the face of the sun. Having eyes that were like fire. Having a sash around his chest that was made of gold. Having feet that were like burnished bronze. Out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword when he spoke. And his voice was like the voice of many waters, like a huge waterfall, like standing next to Niagara Falls. It was like ROAR when he spoke. That's the exalted Christ and one day he's coming back.

And you and I can sit around going, "Yeah, the people pity me." Listen, here's the thing: we are now "children of God," to quote First John 3, but "what we will be hasn't yet been realized," hasn't been seen, hasn't been known, hasn't been revealed. But we will. We will. We will be revealed in a way, the Bible says in Romans Chapter 8, where the sons of God will be presented, or as it is put in First John Chapter 3, "When he appears we know that we'll be like him, because we'll see him as he is."



In the words of Second Timothy 2:12, "If we endure, we will also reign with him." We're going to judge angels. We're going to be in charge. God is going to glorify his saints just like the Father glorified his Son with the glory he had before the beginning of the world. No, we're not God, I understand that. There's a one and only triune God, that he will grant us authority, he'll grant us honor. And if you anticipate the exalted Christ, not a Jesus coming in on a donkey through the gates of Jerusalem, but one according to Revelation 19, who comes in on a white horse and on his thigh, it's like a motocross rider with letters with their sponsor on their thigh, "King of kings and Lord of lords." Anticipate the exalted Christ. Don't pity him.

Yeah, this was the low point, I understand. But Jesus doesn't want you thinking of him that way. Even the reformers didn't like the visage and the image of Christ hanging on a cross. Most of them didn't want a cross around. Right? The iconoclast that they were. We don't need that. It's a distraction. We need the Gospel, we need the preaching of the Gospel. But even in the wake of that reformation they said, "Well OK, we're going to have a cross but that's not where we're going to see Christ in our minds." Right? It has part to do with Catholic theology regarding the mass and the rest, but the point is that there's something about the fact that's not where we see him now. He's exalted, he's glorified.

Keeping your eyes healthy enough to see things both near and far is very difficult for you to do spiritually, and it's hard for me even to do physically, I found out this week. My optometrist said I needed glasses after a lot of years of good vision because of my habits, my work habits. Every day I keep my eyes focused in at a distance that for most of the day at least it's locked in. Right? Like 12 to 16 inches. And doing that for all these years and all that time it just, you know, with my aging eyeballs it just gets harder and harder to see well. They even have a name for it, they have a name for everything, but it's called the Computer Vision Syndrome they call it. Let's just give it a syndrome name. There it is, CVS, and it's not the drugstore. C-V-S. Computer Vision Syndrome.

And then, I love my optometrist, he's great, but then he had the gall to tell me, "Well, you know, this wouldn't have happened had you followed my instructions, which are, you know, you need to blink hard a lot, and every 15 minutes get up and take a break." Yeah, I'm going to take a break every 15 minutes. Right. Let's do that. He says, "Look out the window." I say, "Dr. Nota, you know I don't have windows in my study. It's just a cave." "Well, get up, walk around, look to the side, look to the horizon." And I realize, I just haven't done that. And unfortunately, that has been to my own detriment, the vision detriment that I have.

The Bible tells us that we're not to let our eyes get fixed on the immediate circumstances of our lives. We need frequent breaks. Don't dismiss the physician's, the great physician's, directions to us. We need to fix our eyes on Christ. To envision our vindication of the coming of his kingdom and we need have eyes for the harvest. We need to care about the salvation of the lost.

I thought it was funny when I learned it was called CVS. Because there are a million CVS's that surround us here in Orange County. Right? Like every half block there is another CVS for us to see. Which I thought to myself this week, what does that even stand for? You know what that stands for? Neither did I, had to look it up. Convenience, Value and Service, of all things. Do you care? No I don't care. I don't care. Do you have my stuff at a cheap price? But I thought to myself this is really what we need is we need a vision correction, we need to exercise for us.

I thought it wouldn't be bad with every CVS you pass this week to remember the three things we need. We need a focus on Christ, "C", we need to focus on Christ. And to Christ, let me add this





descriptive, an exalted Christ, a glorified Christ. You need to stay focused on him. That in my mind is who I serve. Not the Jesus hauling his cross through a town. Yes, I remember that, it's the key and the crux of our redemption, and we remember that in the Lord's Supper. But he is the exalted, glorified Christ.

And I need to remember our coming vindication. To step out of the crowd and follow Christ, I know that's hard, but "V", there's your "V", "C-V", vindication. I will be vindicated. Just like Christ was vindicated, we will be. We're going to march through the gates of the kingdom in glorified bodies in the eternal place, no crying, no mourning, no weeping, no pain, no death. The children of God will be exalted, the revelation of the sons of God. What vindication will that be? Keep your eyes on our vindication.

"S", C-V-S. You should care about the Salvation of people because you pity them, you care for them, you have compassion for them. Salvation, the salvation of the lost. Christ, Vindication, Salvation. You're going pass five CVS's on the way home from church today, probably. When you see that, at least this week, that's on what we focus. The glorified Christ, our coming vindication, makes it worth stepping out and following Christ and enduring any of the derision we might get. And ending where we started, I care enough for the lost to say, "Don't pity me, I pity you." The impenitent of our world. I want you to be saved. C-V-S.

Let's pray. God, help us in our world. Get our eyes fixed on where they need to be, as it says in Colossians 3, we need to set our minds on things above, and the things above that are very important for us is the fact that you are exalted and enthroned in heaven. We serve a great king who should not be pitied. He should be adored and worshiped as the Bible says he is being right now, in Revelation 4 and 5, with myriads and myriads of angels and people. And God, we also know that as you call us to take up our cross and follow you, we want to look to that as a great investment. How worth it is it? How great is it if we would lose our lives for his sake, the Bible says we'll find it? What would it profit if I gained the whole world and lost my soul. What great vindication, what value there is in me following Christ.

And God, of course, this passage started with a very simple lesson and that is: I pity, I have great sorrow for the lost and that I should care about that more, should care about their salvation far more than I do. God, imprint this upon our hearts. Make it a frequent reminder for our minds. And let us get excited about the realities that lie beyond this life. The eternal things. Get our minds clearly set on things above and not on things of this earth, that we might be very, very useful here in this world for you and your will, because we have our minds exactly and our vision exactly set where it ought to be in all three of these things, clear and in focus both near and far.

In Jesus name. Amen.