



## **The Power of God's Word – Part 4**

### **Keeping the Focus on Christ**

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Well, maybe some of you have had the experience of trying to make a movie as a kid. Did you ever do that? You and your cousins, or maybe you and your siblings, and you're in the backyard. And the only job your dumb brother had was to point the camera and keep it pointed at you, that's all he had to do. But no, he had to keep turning the camera on himself and making commentary about how stupid all of this was. Disaster, right? You had this great plan for a movie and just your brother ruined it. Well, can you imagine, that's one thing if it's a backyard movie that you're making as a 10-year-old, but imagine if you were up in Hollywood, it was a big-budget movie, you had all the money, all the sets, you had the A-list stars, and the cameraman, the professional cameraman keeps jumping in front of the camera, sticking his head in front of the camera to make comments. I mean, how quickly would that cameraman be fired, right? I mean, the director would possibly just murder the cameraman. This was intolerable, it would never happen.

And yet we can do something much worse when we subtly hijack the focus of what God has asked us to do as Christians. The whole point for us as ambassadors of Christ is, so to speak, to keep the camera focused on Christ. We're supposed to direct people to look and focus at and understand him. That's the whole thing. And yet we can very subtly kind of turn the camera toward ourselves and it's almost like we're calling people to join US. I mean, there's a point to that. I mean clearly they're going to join an assembly, but the assembly is really all about, it's all about Christ. There's a warning for us here in a passage. We're only going to take three verses from Second Corinthians Chapter 4 today as Paul makes clear in his own confession about his ministry and he's contrasting it with something that's been subtle to this point. It'll get more specific as the book goes on, but there are a lot of people out there that Paul is trying to contrast himself with who in fact are turning the camera toward themselves when the camera should be just invariably pointed at Christ. And he's saying that's not how this works. And so there's a slam here going out toward the false teachers and the evangelists who are just really focused on themselves. And so we've got a lot to learn about making sure we never do that. And I think it can happen more easily than you think.

So let's take a look at these three verses, verses 5, 6, and 7 in Second Corinthians Chapter 4 and see if we can't safeguard ourselves against making the same mistake that your dumb brother made as a kid, or sister, or cousin. Let's read this, starting in verse 5. I'll read it from the English Standard Version. It says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves." Because that was happening, and there were people in Corinth and it became about them. And Paul, mockingly later, calls them the super-apostles, right? This is not right, it's about self-exaltation, self-aggrandizement. He says, no, we're not proclaiming ourselves. But we're proclaiming here, "Jesus Christ as Lord." Now, I'm sorry that word has just become so familiar to us that we don't..., it doesn't carry the gravitas that it ought to. But all three of those words are super important. Jesus, Yeshua, that's Joshua, that's his name, means "Yahweh saves." And "Christos," that's the word "Messiah." And the Messiah, Jesus, from Nazareth, is the "Lord." The same word in the New Testament that translates "Yahweh" in the Old Testament.



He's Lord, not just Lord as you might say to somebody who's in charge of an estate that he's the lord of the manner This is THE Lord and we're proclaiming him as the A-list star if there ever was one. He's the star of the universe.

And then he says, "With ourselves as," his servants. Is that what it says? Correct me if I ever read this wrong. No, it's "as your servants." Well, that's weird. Yeah, I think about Paul talking about the Lord. I mean, think of like Romans Chapter 6. Immediately we think of ourselves as we are his servants. And this is the word, by the way, and it should be listed, I'm sure it's got a footnote in the English Standard Version. This is the word "Doulos." I mean this is the word as lowly as you can get, a slave. A slave does whatever the Lord says, whatever the master of the estate says. And he says, we're your slaves for Jesus' sake. Now that's an interesting way to put it. We'll look at that juxtaposition, that contrast, who we promote. But then he quotes, really, the essence of Genesis Chapter 1 verse 3, when he says, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,'" right? And even the culture knows that. Let there be light. God said, "Let there be light." And he said that, and that same God who created something out of nothing, by divine fiat, just BAM, ex nihilo, as they say, out of nothing, "Has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," the Messiah That's big and it's huge and we got to dig into that here in just a minute.

But then it's almost like this is the meat in the middle of the sandwich because here's something that echoes verse 5. In verse 7 it says, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay." That's why we're not promoting ourselves. It's really not about us and look how small and fragile we might be. "We have this treasure," what treasure? Well, there are two things going on in this passage. There's verse 5, we have a ministry to promote Christ. And he's already talked about what a big privilege that is starting in verse 1 of this chapter. And it's also the fact that this happens to us. There's not a fisher of men who hadn't been caught by Christ. There's not an ambassador of Christ who wasn't made his own. So we have the reality of God giving "us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," that's happened to us, that's an amazing treasure. Not to mention the next treasure we have is taking that and passing it down to other people. We proclaim him, that word "proclaim" by the way in verse 5 is the Greek word "Kēryssō" which is often translated "to preach," right? We're proclaiming, we're declaring it, we're preaching Christ, not ourselves. So we have this treasure both the light the knowledge of the greatness of who God is in Christ, but we also have this happening in our own lives and all of this is great. It's the ministry that we have, we have it "in jars of clay." Why? Why such a drastic contrast to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us?

Now, there are some familiar verses here, if you've been around the block in the Bible. But we want to get it in context, we want to understand what's being said, and we'll start with this contrast in verse 5 of the fact that I'm supposed to be a servant of people. And in this case, Paul has already said in the first book that we have, the first extant book that we have to the Corinthians, that he has become their father in the faith. He's winning people to Christ in Corinth. We read about it, we studied it in the book of Acts. He comes to town and he wins people to Christ. He starts preaching in the synagogue. He leads some pretty prominent people to faith in Christ. And then he goes out and he goes into the streets and he is the



evangelist to the Corinthians. And he says, when we're preaching, it's pretty clear we're not preaching ourselves. I'm not hopping in front of the camera and saying, hey, follow me. No, I'm calling people to follow Christ. Now, there is something about setting the pace and certainly if you're going to be an apostle or a preacher, a kēryssō person, you've got to have certain standards, and in that sense there is a biblical precedent and a repeated phrase, follow me as I follow Christ. He said that to the Corinthians in the first book, but when it comes to this statement, we're really not calling people to ourselves. We're not the star of this show. And we should make that very, very clear.

Let's just start with one sentence with two components here. Number one on your outline, and then let's unpack this. Number one, you need to be a servant and see yourself as a servant in two directions and promote the king. And let's just with the last part of this first point. "Be a Servant and Promote the King." You should know that the word "Lord" is a loaded term. It's gigantic and it goes back to the Old Testament and I often refer to it off the cuff, but I want us to get our eyeballs on it in Daniel Chapter 7. When we see Jesus in the New Testament using his favorite phrase of self-identity to the people in the gospel, he calls himself the Son of Man and this phrase is loaded, it comes from Daniel Chapter 7. I want you to turn there and look at this with me because that's the king we're promoting. I just want to show you what a big king he is which should put us in perspective immediately that we're servants of the king and there's a lot in the Bible that says about that. Our passage is not saying we're servants of the king even though we are. But it's saying more than that, we're servants of the people to whom we're proclaiming this to.

But let's start with this, Daniel Chapter 7. Daniel Chapter 7, let's look at this vision in verse 13 of Daniel 7. And as I quote this often, I just have to have you have this in your mind. This is such an important prophecy. "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man." If you wonder why the high priest and the scribes got so upset when Jesus talks about coming on the clouds of heaven, when the Son of Man comes, it's because it's just a quotation of this passage. It's when the high priests start to get freaking out, tearing their clothes, picking up stones to stone him. I can't believe this guy thinks he's that guy. Well, he does. This is the number one self-identified phrase he likes to use when he talks about himself. I'm the Son of Man. It says here, "There came one like a son of man," and the reason the word "like" is there, it's very important, because it just is a mind-boggler. How can someone appear to be a man? Even as it says in Philippians Chapter 2, he came in the appearance as a man. Now was he a man? Sure he was. He redeemed mankind by becoming a man but it's like he's deity in human form as it's put to the Colossians, right? The "fullness of deity dwells in bodily form" in Christ. That's an amazing connection of two worlds colliding in one person.

Now here's the description of one who comes like a Son of Man coming on the clouds. "He came to the Ancient of Days." That phrase, by the way, is used elsewhere, of the Father, the Ancient of Days, "and he was presented before him." So you can see this scene in heaven. "And to him," and the "him" clearly in the Aramaic of this particular passage is referring to the Son of Man, one like a Son of Man as he's called. "And was given to him dominion." Do you know what the word "dominion" means, right? I have autocratic power. I'm despotic in the



sense that there are no checks and balances. I'm completely in charge and I've been given all authority. Even the statements that we read in Matthew, right? Matthew was written by a Jew to a Jewish audience and when Jesus says at the end of the book, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth," even that is a throwback to Daniel Chapter 7. He's been given dominion. Oh, "and glory," the gravitas, the weightiness, the worth, "and a kingdom," which if you've read from verse 1 of Chapter 1 of Daniel, you'll know that's the repeated theme. There's a kingdom coming that's bigger than Babylon, and Babylon, you want to talk about an autocratic leader, Nebuchadnezzar sure was that. He just destroyed Jerusalem and took guys like Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel with him to Babylon, along with a bunch of other slaves, and he was in charge. Whatever he says goes.

And when he has that vision about that statue, here's Daniel trying to interpret all that. When he gets to the bottom of describing all the successive kingdoms, which represent Babylon, the Medo-Persians. That was after the Assyrians had fallen to the Babylonians, and that's what was making Nebuchadnezzar's head just swell. And then we have Greece depicted here, and then at the bottom you have in the legs, you have Rome, and in the feet, you have some kind of weird composite of Rome and clay, which is the world we now live in. All the successions of kingdoms. And then it says, but then there's a rock that comes from heaven, a rock that comes from heaven. Were you here the last Good Friday? Was it the last Good Friday, or two Good Fridays ago when we talked about the rock or was that at Christmas? I don't know. I've been preaching here for 20 years. Everything's a blur to me, but... There was a rock that comes like a "stone that the builders rejected." That rock comes and hits the bottom of all these successive kingdoms and replaces it. And it grows up to encompass the whole world. And the kingdom supplants every human kingdom. And here, that's how we define the word "kingdom" here. He's in charge of the whole wide world. And if we didn't get that, middle of verse 14, that all peoples, nations, and languages should, now here's a word in Aramaic that describes worship, the Hebrew equivalent is the word that we have that means to worship, to serve, to obediently bow down and do whatever he says. Much like they had to do to Nebuchadnezzar, which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to do.

Everyone should serve him. And "his dominion is an everlasting dominion." There are no successive kingdoms after he shows up, "which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed," ever. So the Son of Man, this is a big deal. And when we talk about the word "Lord," right? That's a word that is huge. Was the word, "Kurios," this New Testament Greek word, was it used of people? Sure, if you were an important person, you might be called lord. And that's true. But that word goes just telescopically into heaven. I mean, in an Old Testament text that had the word "Yahweh," and they would translate that with the same word, only we know that's a big deal. And so we have the word "lord," like big, this is God. And here we have one that looks like a person, like a Son of Man, like someone born of a human family. And this one is the king of the kingdom, and all dominion was given him that every person, all peoples, every person of every nation, all nations, every person of every language, should worship him. I mean, you understand that you can't get away from the fact that if you are a Jew, the first commandment was you don't serve anyone, you don't worship anyone, you don't bow down to anyone but God.



This is a monotheistic religion. And yet here is one who comes before the Ancient of Days, and the Ancient Days, the Father is pleased to give all authority to the Son, exactly what Jesus comes on the scene and says. And the Bible says in Philippians Chapter 2 that describes this weird kenosis, this emptying of the independence of his divinity, the way he would express his majesty in heaven. He comes like a servant and even dies on a cross. It just completely shatters our thinking about God. How can God even die? This doesn't even make any sense. And it says that one day after he is highly exalted "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ," here's our word again, "is Lord to the glory," of the Ancient of Days, "of God the Father." This is an amazing truth. And I just want you to think about this because if it really means what it says, and it was all fulfilled in Christ, that all peoples, nations, and languages should worship him and serve him and bow down before him, you just need to think about when you go and say, I represent him. I want people to know him. I want to point the camera of my life on him. I want people to see clearly who I worship. I came to church and sang songs about him. Why? Because he is the king and he's coming back in a kingdom that will absolutely supplant every kingdom of the world. I don't care how many bombs you have. I don't care how many aircraft carriers you have, I don't care how many nuclear warheads you have, I don't care what your Air Force looks like, Christ is going to come and with a word it will come out of his mouth like a sword and he will conquer his enemies and he will save his people and he will set up a kingdom that will supplant every other kingdom, there will never be another kingdom ever that will supplement his.

I mean this is the promise of that child in Isaiah Chapter 9 "and the government will rest on his shoulders." If you believe that every single non-Christian will put his head down on the ground and confess, even though it's too late to be redeemed, it's too late to enter the kingdom, but they will all confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and the Ancient of Days will be glorified by that. That I'm just thinking, why are we so afraid to talk about him? Some of you in this room have not talked to a non-Christian about your Christianity for years, some of you. Some of you it has been months. And I'm just saying why don't you talk about him knowing that every single set of eyeballs that you look into one day will say, Jesus Christ is Lord, every nation, every people, every language, they're going to bow down to him and say he is king. And if that's true, we just want to help people see that. We'd like to get the focus on that. Not like, come to my church, it's really cool. I mean, oh, okay, there's something about coming to church, but that's not even close to what we're proclaiming. Let's not stick our church in front of the camera lens. This is about a person who happens to be one like a Son of Man, who has all dominion and is coming in a kingdom and nothing will ever supplant it and there's no power that you've ever even imagined that will rival his authoritative power. I just think it starts with us saying we're promoting him. "Kerusso," we're proclaiming him. A kerusso would be someone who comes and says, hey, the king is coming. The king is coming, you better get ready. He's coming to your village, he's coming to your town, he's coming to your city. Everyone ought to be ready, because whatever he says, he has the power of life and death in his mouth.

You're a servant to that king, there's no doubt about that, Romans Chapter 6. We're not going to look at it because that's not the meaning of our text. It says, in this particular passage,





when it comes to our servant perspective, it should be that we're servants to the people who we are trying to get them to see the greatness of Christ. We're preaching Jesus Christ as King, as Lord, as the one with all dominion. And what we're saying is, how can I serve you to get you to see this? I just want you to think about how common this is.

First Corinthians Chapter 9, I know you know this passage. Here's what it says about our role, our job. After Paul says I'm going to go out and preach, I should preach, I should proclaim the greatness of Christ, I don't charge people and I'm out there on the mission field, right? I want to do my job and then proclaim this. Verse 19 now says, "Though I'm free from all," I'm not a servant of those people, they're not my master, Christ is my master, "I have made myself a *doulos* to all." So I voluntarily made the decision that I'm going to serve these people. Why? Who are they? The church? No. "That I might win more of them. To the Jew I became like a Jew, in order to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under law (though not being myself under the law) that I may win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some."

Now, there's a passage that should convict you. That'd be a good memory verse to have, that little short verse. "To the weak I became weak," or let's just get to verse 23. "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in its blessings," all for of the gospel. "I've become all things to all people," middle of verse 22, "that by all means I might save some." And I just want to think why in the world would you subject yourself to try and help your non-Christian co-worker, family member, neighbor, why would you serve them? Because the Bible says that's what people do who understand the greatness of Christ and see people who don't see the greatness of Christ. And does it affect you? Absolutely, Romans Chapter 9 verses 1 and 2. It makes you cry that they don't get it. Chapter 10, it makes you think, if I could trade my salvation to have them saved, I would do it. It makes you desperate in a sense. It makes you weep. I have anguish in my soul, Paul said. These people aren't getting it.

Turn to another passage with me, Second Timothy Chapter 2. One tiny little verse here that can help us. If you said how was your week, Pastor Mike? And I said, oh, I endured it. Would you think I had a good week or a bad week? Bad week. I endured it, I endured it. You don't use the word "endure" unless it's hard. Look at verse 10. Second Timothy Chapter 2 verse 10, "Therefore," Paul says, "I endure everything," so that means the hard stuff, that's what servants do, they have a hard job, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect." Oh, you're serving the church. No, no, keep reading, "that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." It's going to change their forever. Okay, so you are doing everything for people who will be saved. Yeah, that's the point. And I just want to ask you what have you done to go out of your way or sacrifice for the non-Christians in your sphere of influence so that they might see clearly the greatness of Christ so they're not on the wrong side of history? So that they will actually be welcomed into the kingdom. What have you done? How have we served? How have you expended yourself? As Paul said, I'm more than happy, "I will gladly spend and be spent for your souls." I want to do that and see myself as a servant of those who will be saved.



Will you, quote unquote, waste your time on people who won't be saved? Oh yeah, there are going to be a lot of people who are going to reject you. We talked about that last week. But we need to understand this. If you spend 10 months trying to help someone, buying them a Bible, answering questions, looking up stuff you wouldn't have had to look up if they hadn't asked you that, going and digging a little deeper, taking them out to coffee, talking to them about their relationship with God, their understanding of theology, whether or not there is a God or creation or whatever you're dealing with, and you finally get them to the place 10 months from now, putting their trust in Christ, I guarantee you no one's going to think, wow, I shouldn't have done that. You're going to say, "I endured everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." We're servants of the king, yes, but I want you to see yourself also as a servant of the lost.

One passage I'll turn you to in your small groups this week is Acts Chapter 8, where the "angel of the Lord says to Philip, 'Rise and go toward the south on the road that goes down to Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is a desert place." OK, well, that didn't sound like a great assignment. Go to the desert. Right? There's no air conditioning here. "And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian eunuch." Do you remember this story? "A court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship." So he's some kind of proselyte of Judaism and he's gone up to Jerusalem to worship. Now he was going home "and was returning, seated in his chariot and he was reading the prophet Isaiah." So apparently he went up to this feast day or this festival and they were reading I'm assuming from Isaiah. So it got him interested and he was rich enough to have a copy of Isaiah. So he pulls out the scroll and he's reading it and I love this, the angel of the Lord, verse 26, sends Philip down there to the desert road. And it says in verse 30, "So Philip ran to him." That's good. I just like that. That's a little bit of endurance. Have you done any running this week? I mean, he's running to meet the assignment to help someone see the greatness of Christ. "Philip ran to him and heard that he was reading Isaiah the prophet and he asked," hey, hey, "do you understand what you are reading?" You're reading the Bible. Did you get it? "And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?'"

Oh, well, you've teed it up now God. "And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him." And then it talks about the conversion experience. It ends in conversion of the Ethiopian who probably brought Christianity to this place as a very important convert. The whole Coptic Church launched through this conversion right here. I just want you to think about the fact that here Philip was willing to go to a place he wouldn't have gone. He's willing to put effort into it and run to do it and he's willing to engage in a theological discussion. And I just wonder if there was any sweaty palm thinking, I don't know what he's going to ask me about Isaiah, it's a pretty deep book. But praise God, he was reading a passage that if any Christian knows this passage should know what it means. And by God's grace, God gives him what he needs to be able to lead this man to Christ. Philip is a servant.

Just like later, we see Priscilla and Aquila in the book of Acts, right? When Apollos doesn't quite get it, they pulled him aside, they sat him down, and they taught him "the way of Christ more accurately." I just love the fact that there are people all throughout the book of Acts



enduring the difficulties and the sacrifice of putting other people's needs to know Christ above their own. Everything about the book that we studied in Acts, the heroes of that book are the people who are servants of the people who would inherit eternal life. Be a servant and promote the king, that's our job. It's not about promoting us, and you've seen that. I guess you can even imagine thinking through the long list of crazies that we have saying in the name of Christ all kinds of things but doing nothing but promoting themselves. This is not about that. It's not about people getting their donations from shut-ins so that they can buy their Lear jets, you know that. That's the extreme caricature of this problem, but it can be creeping into our discussions as well. This is about the greatness of the Son of Man, and we are the servants of those who don't quite understand that yet.

Verse 6, back to our passage. God gives us plenty of good reasons to keep the focus on the triune God. And when we put the focus on the triune God, look at verse 6, in the middle of this discussion about the smallness of who we are and the greatness of who God is, he says I just want you to understand, I'm talking about seeing people won to Christ. I just want to think about all that. And this has to be said in light of verse 4. Now remember verse 4 said the god of this world, which is not the God of the Bible, it's the god to the world, Satan, the evil one as he's called in First John 5, "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Ephesians Chapter 2, "The prince of the power of the air." That person is blinding the eyes of the unbelievers. And even last week, I said, well, he's stronger than you are. He's smarter than you are, so we're going to have to pray to God. And that's where we left it last week. But now we're going to move it into verse 6. And look what it says in verse 6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is a doctrine in the New Testament that is very, very important for us to catch. And the more you ponder it the more you recognize that that little phrase about the greatness of God and the glory of God being fully responsible for things like our salvation is super helpful. We immediately get there if we just ponder this truth.

Let's put it this way. Number two, you need to "Credit God for Open Hearts." Credit God for open hearts. When Philip climbs out of the chariot he doesn't say, I'm so glad I took all those evangelism courses. He didn't say I am a good persuasive evangelist. I'm so glad I've studied Isaiah. Now, you might have some fleshly thoughts like that, but at the end of the day when you recognize that Satan blinds the eyes of the unbelievers and that they walk according to the power of the one who's working now in the sons of disobedience, if there's any freedom from that, it doesn't come from me or my speech. It comes from the power of God's Word and the Spirit of God doing his work as God opens up eyes and hearts. Now I use the word "heart" because that's eventually where it goes, but the Doctrine of Illumination, that's what we call it in theology, the Doctrine of Illumination which we often quote Psalm 119 verse 18. I think it's verse 18, yes, Psalm 119 verse 18, we want God to open our eyes so we can see wonderful things in his Word. It usually starts with our rational understanding. And you might think if you're a Sunday school grad, First Corinthians Chapter 2, right? The spiritual things that the Bible talks about, to fully understand them, to think through the implications of them, the Bible says, those are spiritually discerned. You need the Spirit of God to get it.





Matter of fact, let's go there once you write this down. We're going to credit God for open hearts. Let's go to First Corinthians Chapter 1. You can't get to Chapter 2 until you really process the truth of Chapter 1. And Chapter 1 is going to say some strong things about a message here. Verse 18, First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 18, "the word of the cross," if it's wrongly taught, it will be folly to those who are perishing. Highlight the words, if it's wrongly taught. Do you see it there? It's not there. "The word of the cross," let's just assume rightly taught, "is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it's the power of God." It's the same exact thing. Jonathan Edwards liked to talk about the Doctrine of Illumination as God granting us a "new taste for the excellence of divine truth." There's his phrase. A new taste for the excellence of divine truth.

It reminds me of my encounter with avocados as a little kid. The taste of Hass avocados has not changed from my childhood to the present. They haven't changed. They tasted exactly the same back in the day. And when my dad would slice one open at the dinner table and there it sat and my little eight-year-old eyeballs locked with the green mushy thing, I said gross. And when mom tried to get me to take a little spoonful, here, try a little bit. Like, gross. It tasted like a green bean to me. I didn't like it. I still don't like green beans. But avocados, man, Carlynn served me an avocado two nights ago, I could have eaten ten of those. Just cut them open, I don't need anything on them, I don't need your crazy Orange County toast. (audience laughing) All I need is a spoon, I need a spoon and some salt. That's all I need. And I can just down those things. I love Hass avocados, I love them. What changed? Well, I grew up and I realized, my dad, by the way, my mom would force me to try it. When I said, dad, I don't like that, do you know what dad used to say? More for us. (audience laughing) Good for you, just fine with me. Parenting was different back then, because if I said, oh, I want a yogurt stick or something. No, no, you get avocado or nothing here with your dinner. Whatever. Don't get me started on parenting. All I'm telling you is I acquired a taste for it and now I love it. It tastes the same.

The gospel is the same and if some of you have adult conversion experiences where you as a college student rejected Christianity and it was rightly taught to you, the cross was presented to you, but you couldn't handle the fact as we focused on last week that you're a sinner and because you couldn't handle that fact you thought this was foolish. God becoming a man to die on a cross. That's ridiculous. Why would he do that for? If he wants to forgive us he can just shrug his shoulders and say boys will be boys and forgive us just like Grandpa does. That's not how this works. And it was foolishness to you. You heard sermons that were biblical that right now would absolutely, you'd love it, but you didn't love it then, you hated it. You thought it was foolish. I've seen that experience with non-Christians. They sit here and they've given me an earful about what a terrible preacher I am. And then five years later, they're still here because their wife is dragging him. Now they're a Christian. Now they love my preaching. And I say to them, yeah, I really changed a lot in the last five years. I'm preaching so much better now. And I understand this, your taste has changed. To quote Jonathan Edwards, you have a "new taste of the excellence of divine truth." That's what you now have. You didn't have it before.



So we recognize the Doctrine of Illumination. We often talk about clearing the mind. It gives you an intellectual connection to this and you say, I like it now. It's a rational acceptance of the truth. Verses 19 and 20, if you're still in First Corinthians Chapter 1, all the wisdom of the wise, quote unquote, nah, it's just, he's going to thwart it all, right? Where's the wise? Where's the debater? Where's the scribe? "God's made foolish to wisdom of the world." Why? "For since," verse 21, "in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom." You get all the PhDs from the philosophy department at UCLA and USC and bring them down, put them on stage and say let's tell me about how to know God? They mumble, God, we're not even sure... and the problem of evil... and the big bang... We get all of this and you'll never know God through secular philosophy. Pick whatever you want cosmologists, mathematicians, what do you want? Ethicists, microbiologists, bring them up on stage. Let's talk. At the end of the day, the world's wisdom doesn't lead you to know God, but I can take an intern with one year of education at Compass Bible Institute, if they know the Bible, and they can get up here with very little practice in teaching the truth, but if they teach the truth as ineloquently as they may do it, as unartfully as they may do it, you can come to know the living God.

What's the difference between the PhD who spent his life with peer-reviewed articles and all the journals of philosophy and the kid who's done a year at Compass Bible Institute? What's the difference? The difference is that God opens the eyes of unbelievers when the truth is taught, he has to do it because you don't have the taste for it. You can't do it. It's right there but you can't grab it because someone has to open this up to you. Speaking of my dad, the avocado eater, we had safes in the garage. I don't know, he may still have a bunch of them. But we would buy like old bank safes. We had them not only where I hung out on the weekends at this weird, and don't get me started, at the weird pistol range I hung out at and the rifle club I was in, the shooting club. But we all had safes not because we had gold bars or money but we had a lot of firearms. So dad had these huge safes that weighed millions of pounds or whatever. And one thing, I remember hanging out as a 10-year-old at the range and in the range house where they had ammo and all that, I didn't care much about the ammo but all the guns were locked up, there were big safes there and I remember as a kid taking the wheel of the safe, the handles and the bars, and I'd pretend it was a ship wheel or whatever, and I could do that all day long. And I could spin the dial on the combination all day long, I couldn't get the thing open.

But I could have the feeble old man who worked there, who'd go over there and say get out of the way, kid, and he'd spin that thing, spin that thing, spin that thing, open it up. The difference was, I didn't have the combination. I just didn't. And there's something about the spiritual eyes of people opening, you don't have the combination for that. I can preach the gospel, as it says in this passage, just to one person and they don't get it. I mean, they think it's ridiculous. And yet the other person, their eyes are open. Why? Because God is willing to say, let there be light. And the "knowledge of the greatness," of the glory of God in the face of Christ, BAM, I get it now. But I use the word "heart" in this point. Credit God for open hearts, because that's where this all goes. Where it goes also in First Corinthians Chapter 1. He talks about calling in verse 26, if you're still there. It says you're not wise according to the worldly standards, but somehow you figured out the gospel. You're not powerful but somehow you



have the power of Christ. You're not noble but somehow you're a child of the king. Verse 27, "God chose," here are other words "calling" and "chose," "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are." Look at verse 30, "Because of him you are in Christ Jesus."

Now, that's the part we've got to get. You've got to credit God, and I know you want to put between God and the word "for," and me a little bit. No, no, no. Just take that out. It's "because of him you're in Christ Jesus, who became to us the wisdom of God, the righteousness and sanctification and redemption." It's because of him, not you. And that's super helpful. That particular picture of crediting God should be so profound that it's not only the understanding of intellectual truth, it's not just the truth of the gospel starts to make sense, but it's when all the tumblers fall in places as God dramatically opens up your mind to understand it. He also affects your volition and puts you in Christ and now all of a sudden you want Christ whereas before you didn't want Christ. You didn't think you needed Christ. There's an intellectual tumbler that falls in place and then there's a volitional where all of a sudden the hinges open up. It's like I want Christ.

There are always the external words that connect with internal receptivity and it's all the connection of the fact that God has worked in the sinner's heart. The truth is always the same. It's like you taking a handful of seed, going out there into the field and throwing it on different kinds of soil. If it hits the pavement, it's not going to take root. If it hits good soil it's going to take root. What's the difference? Did you throw a bad seed on the sidewalk, but a good seed in the fertile ground? No, it has nothing to do with that. It has to do one soil that's been prepared. The other one's just hard-packed dirt. Just a walkway. It's not going to sprout. Does that sound familiar? That almost sounds biblical. Jesus should use that. That's a great illustration. Acts 13, I referenced this last week, but we didn't turn there. Acts 13:48 and 49, "When the Gentiles heard," this is funny because the Jews had just kicked Paul out. They kicked him out because of jealousy. It says, "When they heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord." I like what you're saying. They don't like it, I like it, I'm going to glorify, I'm going to praise, I'm going to cheer the words that you're preaching. "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." The combination lock had to turn, right? They got it. They had the taste for it and they had the volitional open door and they said, yes, we take it. "As many as were appointed to eternal life."

Who appoints to eternal life? Paul? No. That's why we don't know who's going to be saved. We go out and persuasively share the message. And when we get into the next chapter of Second Corinthians in our two series from now, the bottom of Chapter 5, you'll see I'm all about persuasion. I mean, by the time we get to verse 10 of Second Corinthians 5, I want you to know the fear of God and persuade men. But it's really not the persuasion that works. And it's not the intelligence of the person that you're sharing with. God has to appoint them to eternal life. And then they believe the connection of the words of Paul. Rejected by the Jews, accepted by these Gentiles and it says in verse 49 because of all this and God's word, "the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region," and that's what I pray for in South Orange County, California This is our mission field as I said last time. We need to care



about the lost people. We're never going to do that. If you don't think he's really the king, we started there, if you don't think about the fact that you ought to be inconvenienced and endure whatever it takes to get them to know it and secondly knowing that ultimately it's his work. He's the one who calls people to life. And we saw that last week in Ephesians Chapter 2, he made people alive together with Christ. That's his work. It's all over the Bible. I know we struggle with it because we want a little bit of the credit, but the credit goes to him alone.

I skipped over a couple of verses there in First Corinthians Chapter 1. I'd like you to look at them now because it's going to lead us right into verse 7 of our passage. Look at verse 29 if you still have First Corinthians Chapter 1 open. Well, why would we, Pastor Mike? You took us to Acts. I know. But you can just go back. You got your computers, your phones. Or it's all warmed up if you have it on the printed page. Feel for the warm pages. You'll be right back there in First Corinthians 1. "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are." This is verse 28. Now verse 29, "So that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Do you think there are any other verses you can think of that remind us that we're not supposed to boast about our salvation? "For by grace you've been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing, not a result of works, it is the gift of God, so that no one may boast." This seems to be a big theme in the Bible. Verse 31 of First Corinthians Chapter 1, all of this is done "because of him," verse 30, "we're in Christ Jesus," verse 31, "so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" You can only boast about what God does. You can't boast about what you do because when it comes to the gospel, you're not interested. Oh, but I am interested. Well, where did you get that interest? That's the whole point. We have to credit God with this. Does that take evangelism out of the equation? Never, never. Does that take persuasion out of it? Never. Does that mean I don't need to know apologetics? Yes, you need to study apologetics. All of this is true, but we have to credit God when it all works. God prepares the soil of the heart. God opens the eyes like he did the day he sent photons into the creation of time and space.

Verse 7 now in our text. "We have this treasure in jars of clay." Do you know what it's for? Why are we weak? "To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." How do we get past people's objections? How do we get people to understand this? How do we get people to believe it? It's the surpassing power and it belongs to our methods. The right Kennedy Questions, the Evangelism Explosion, the Four Spiritual Laws, the tracks that we have, the apologetics. No, no, no. It's because of God's power. Number three, you need to "Realize You're Weak for a Reason." God has chosen the low things so that no one would boast. We don't have all the PhDs from USC, UCLA, UC Irvine. They don't teach our Sunday school classes here. Why is it that just normal people are doing the work of teaching and training and people in this church who would never be a life coach or out there sharing the gospel in their neighborhood and people are coming to Christ? Why does God choose the low things? So that no one would boast. The work of people coming to faith in Christ is the biggest thing ever, the biggest decision ever. Think of it that way. And that is brokered by normal people? How is it that not many of us are of noble birth? Not that it doesn't happen every now and then. Not that we don't have someone every now and then who is unique, but it's the common folk who are doing this.



As a matter of fact, Paul says we're called here "jars of clay," fragile containers. Please know this: admitted weakness is the key to real fruitfulness all throughout the Bible. Why? Because James 4:6 and so many other passages remind us God is opposed to the proud but he gives strong, gracious support to the humble. If you stay humble in all this then God can use you. Did you read our Daily Bible Reading yet this morning? We were in Second Chronicles, no, First Chronicles. Where are we in our Daily Bible Reading? Uzziah, Chapter 26? I don't know, I shouldn't have started all that. But I do want to talk about Uzziar because we just read this morning or you'll read it tonight. Uzziah is there as the king for 52 years. And in the latter days of his kingship, what happens? What does he do? He goes into the temple and tries to act like he's a Levite. He's not a Levite. He tries to burn incense there like he's a Levite and all the priests come and say you're not qualified to do this. You're the king. We respect you and all but you're not all that, man. You're not a priest, get out of here. And do you remember when he angrily responded to them what happened to Uzziah Sunday school grads, Daily Bible Readers? Leprosy on his forehead. It didn't start in his armpit, it didn't start on his knees, it didn't start on his back. I just love the fact he's there angry and it starts right here on his head where everyone can see it.

And if you had leprosy in the Old Testament, man, you were going to be in a leper colony. You had to cry out the Old Testament law said "unclean, unclean" before anybody comes up to you, unclean. You certainly couldn't be on the Temple Mount. He had to live sequestered in a back room. Why? All because the Bible says he became proud and here's how it was put, "to his own destruction." I mean, it's James 4:6 all over again. It's all over the Bible. Peter quotes it in First Peter 5. It's all over the Old Testament. If you become proud, whatever good you are doing, it's just going to come to an end. God has a good way of keeping his servants humble. Even when you think like the Apostle Paul, wow, Apostle Paul, he's so powerful. He must be super prideful. Don't ever think people who are doing really good ministry are prideful just because of what they're doing. God has a great way of keeping the servants who continue on in fruitfulness, keeping them humble. The reality is that we're nothing. We're nothing. Some of my old mentors used to say we're like a thumb in a bucket of water. As soon as I'm gone, the hole is filled before I can even see. God carries on his work. It doesn't ride on my shoulders or anyone else's shoulders in this room. No one keeps the Church going but Christ.

So humility is the key to fruitfulness. If you're humble, he can use you. But you've got to stay humble, first of all, by knowing you brought nothing to the equation of your salvation but your sin and now that you want to be used as a fisher of men, which you should be, an ambassador of Christ, a servant of people to get them to see the greatness of God, in particular, the Lordship of Christ, just stay humble. Just say it ain't about me and you're not going to be tempted to put your face in front of the camera. You're going to say it's about Christ. I don't want you to feign this kind of phony humility. Oh, I'm so sick of that. I don't want you to fake this. There's nothing more prideful than faking your own humility. Right? Nobody? Have you not seen that? Surely you know some people like that. It's gross. You just need to know that you are expendable in all of this. Admit your weakness, God will keep you fruitful.





There are two extremes on this continuum and I want to deal with the first one. Some of you feel too weak to serve. I'm too weak to share Christ with my coworkers. They've seen me lose my temper, I'm not a great husband, I don't know, I mean what if my mom finds out I'm trying to promote Christ, she knows I'm a jerk. I don't know what your thoughts are. You're a loser. If you think you're too weak to be useful to God, I'm just saying you just need to keep going. Just stop with all that. Here's what the Bible says. I know you know this verse, First Timothy Chapter 1 verse 15, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance," by you and everyone else, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and Paul says, "I'm the foremost. But I received mercy. I was persecuting the church, "but I received mercy for this reason." Why did God pick this man to write most of the New Testament books? Why? It says so, "that in me, as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him to eternal life." So Paul's sinful past should show you that if you think you're too much of a loser, too weak, too messed up to be used by God, all I want to say is that's why God picked people like Paul. Or do you want me to start with other people? Do you want to hang out? Do you want to go out golfing with Esau and Jacob? Do you know who you're really going to want to hang out with? Esau. Who did God pick? Jacob.

Do you want to save your nation from the Midianites, do you want to pick that strapping, brave, courageous warrior, or do you want to pick Gideon who's hiding in the shadows? I want to pick the warrior. Who did God pick? Gideon. Do you want a king? Do you want to great king for Israel who would secure the borders? And you got all of Jesse's sons in front of you, you're certainly not going to pick David. This is all over the Bible. Do you understand this? And then Paul becomes the hero. And Paul's the hero of the New Testament apostles, defending his apostleship throughout the rest of the book of Second Corinthians. And you couldn't have picked someone who's going to demonstrate more of God's patience and mercy than Paul. So get over yourself. Part of this pride is sometimes bound up in people's minds thinking, oh, I'm not good enough to serve. Stop thinking that's how this works. Just make yourself available to God, admit your weakness, and do what he says. When you're feeling weak, just remember the passage we studied in First Corinthians Chapter 1. Not many are noble, not many are wise according to human standards.

And by the way, when you feel strong and it doesn't take too long for a fisherman to feel like he's a genius fisherman, all you have to do is catch a couple of fish, then he's the best fisherman in the world. If God uses you to do something great, like win someone to Christ when you're sitting up here beaming because somebody you led to Christ at work is in the baptismal tank, getting baptized, sharing their story and you're sitting there going, yeah, look at me, man. I'm just a gift to God and the mission in the 21st century. You'd never say that because you know you've been chided to stay humble, but you're feeling it. I just want to say this, if you're starting to feel like a big shot in Christianity, beware. Let me just tell you that you can measure being a big shot by a lot of things. But that passage that Paul quoted at the end of First Corinthians Chapter 1, "let him who boasts boast in the Lord" comes from Jeremiah Chapter 9. Let me read the context. "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom.'" And some people think they're blessed by God because they're super smart. "Let not the mighty man boast in his might." A lot of people think they've got positions of power, I'm



all that. Don't boast in that. "Let not the rich man boast in his riches." Some of you here are really rich. Don't boast about that. Don't think, well, that's because God really, really likes me. All of those things are just gifts to you. God's looking to see how you're going to be a steward of your wisdom, of your position, your authority, and of your money. He's just looking to see how you going to do with all that.

"But let him who boasts, boast in this, that he understands and knows me," God says, "that I am the Lord," not you, I'm the Lord, "who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." Just be excited about me. And then we know from Old Testament prophecies, he's going to send "one like a Son of Man" to come into the world who's going to lead a kingdom revolution one day with the word of his mouth and everyone's going to bow down and your job is to just keep the camera on him. There's something liberating about this truth if you really get to it. There's something liberating about this. It's not based on your greatness, it's based on the greatness of the one we're supposed to get into clear focus. And we're going to serve all day, if we have to do it, helping people to see it. We're going to say, come look, look, look at this. It's not about you. We're just fragile containers, jars of clay.

If you go to Israel with us, we'll certainly take you to Qumran in the Judean desert. And it was back in 1947 that an amazing thing happened when a Bedouin shepherd threw a rock into a cave and got a surprising sound coming out of the cave, the sound of broken pottery. And that began a series of discoveries in a series of caves just outside of Masada, where they found something we have come to know as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The biggest, most important find of any manuscript trove that we've ever had, right? The oldest extant copies, the oldest known existing copies predating Christ of the Old Testament. An amazing find. Some of you went up to see the traveling display not long ago, our church went up there to see it. Some of you have come to Israel with us and you've been to the Shrine of the Book. You've looked at these manuscripts, it's amazing. Well, if you do that, depending on when we go and you're so hot and sweaty after taking the tour of Qumran, you'll go into the air-conditioned gift shop and you'll certainly buy a soda or a water or something and then you might do what I did and that is this is such a fascinating place. I can't believe what they found here and you might buy like I did a little replica of the jars. And what they do with these replicas is they take a small replica of the jars, because some of them were like up this tall, and they'd take big scrolls, like the Isaiah scroll, roll it up and put in it.

Well, you can buy this little like seven-inch jar, and it's got a little photocopy of some scroll inside of it. And so I wrapped it up in my underwear or whatever to get it back safely to the United States. That's a terrible scene. Oh, sweater, I didn't take sweaters. T-shirt, okay, what do you want me to wrap it in? I wrapped it up in something to try and get it back, because I knew something about this jar. It's fragile. But it was in a box. And I wrapped up in some clothes. And I got it all the way back from Tel Aviv on a flight to California. And I brought it here to South Orange County, one of my trips to Israel. And I unwrapped it, was so proud, I pulled it out. It's all in one piece. I set it up on my bookshelf. And that little 7-inch little piece of pottery looked like just a jar of clay. It sat there. And I'd look at it often and think, oh, that's cool. Until the day I bumped my bookshelf. And it fell over and I heard it go CRASH, like, oh,



no. It's like a Brady Bunch episode. Only I was both the mom and the kid. It was like I was mad at myself. And then I wanted to grab glue. I wanted to glue it all back together. And then it kind of dawned on me, I'm not going to glue this thing back together, this is the example of Second Corinthians Chapter 4. This is it.

So if you come to my office today you'll find this on my bookshelf, I still have it. It's just that it's broken. You know what didn't break? The little photocopied Isaiah scroll on the inside. Now it's peeking through, because the jar is broken. And I just thought to myself, that's it. I saw it this week, I'm prepping this sermon. That's it! We've got a message that God has put within us, that he's given you open eyes and open hearts to receive, and our whole point is to get it out. And one day it's going to fall, the earthquake's going to hit, it's going to come off my shelf and bust into pieces. I just, you know, you're going to be gone, I'm going to be gone, but until we're gone, you may think you're too messed up, you can't glue yourself back together enough to be useful, I just tell you, keep going, keep talking, talk about Christ, represent him. It's God who chooses to open the eyes of the unbelievers, just get the message out there. Let's see what God does.

Pray with me. God, please help us as Christians in a day where it's costly, not as costly as it was in the first century, not as costly as it is around the world in plenty of places. But we still know it's not pleasant to talk when our message is going to be ridiculed or we might lose a relationship over this. But God, when we gain a brother or sister in Christ because we've spoken up about the gospel, what a day of rejoicing that will be. So help us to realize it's really not about our lives or who we are. Broken, fragile containers of a great eternal message, which one day by your grace, you're not going to leave us as broken pottery. You're going to remake us to be like Christ with a body and a soul and a spirit that's perfectly the way it ought to be. And we're going rejoice in your presence in the kingdom. It'll be good. But for now, God, we feel like we have feet of clay, like we have lives of clay. But we want to keep letting the shining light of the glory of Christ come through our mouths. We want to put people's focus on him and I pray we will do that more fervently and effectively this week for you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.