



Presenting Christ-Part 6

Staying on Task

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Well, every school teacher knows, and every college professor, I assume, knows as well that there are those times at the beginning of a lecture where they're often interrupted with a raised hand and the student asking the simple question, will this be on the test? And every teacher knows that the answer they give to that question makes all the difference in how those students are going to interact with that material. Or like when a teacher just makes a statement about something that needs to be done or should be done, they give some kind of directive, and the hand shoots up, and the question is, is that an assignment? Will that be graded? I mean, that's an important question if you're a student.

Now, most Christians, they are quick to confess that the Bible is God's instruction book—they get that, they recognize that—but most Christians, sadly, they think it's a set of instructions for which there will never be an exam. And they read the Bible every day, they read directions in there and directives, and they see that God's saying this and that and do this and do that. But I mean, most Christians think, yeah, it's not a real assignment. It is an assignment, never one that'll be graded. But the Bible couldn't be more clear—the Professor has been very clear on this matter, has He not? Capital P. That Professor, I mean.

Second Corinthians chapter five, verse 10—I mean, crystal clear—speaking to Christians: we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we can receive what is **due** us, that idea of this evaluation. And if that just seems like, I don't know, maybe that's just a rare idea—it's all over the Bible. I think of Romans chapter 14, verse 12, and a discussion about how we treat one another in the church. And here Paul says, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Now I understand those are uncomfortable themes. But I mean, they are so clear in the Bible.

Almost every day of the school year, I'll ask my kids when they come home, or I come home, you know, for dinner, and I talk about what's your homework tonight? How much homework do you have? What kind of assignments do you have tonight? Now my kids know enough about grades and assignments to know that it is never an acceptable answer to say, I don't know. Not good. If we care about assignments and grades, we certainly need to know what the assignments are. We have to have crystal clarity about that, or we have no hope in the whole assignment/grading thing.

It's interesting as we read through the life of Christ, as He humbles Himself and lives a life that becomes a template for our lives, that He Himself puts Himself in a position of taking assignments from the Father, knowing what those are, and recognizing that He is out to accomplish the things that the Father has asked Him to do. I mean, that is a pattern we see particularly in chapter four of Luke as we finish this chapter, and we tie up this series that we've been looking at in Luke. If you



haven't taken your Bibles yet and turned there, it'd be a great passage for you to look at as we look at the last three verses of Luke chapter four.

After Jesus has come and presented His claims to His hometown—it started in Nazareth, as you remember—He went in the synagogue, didn't have a good reception there. He moves on to Capernaum; He teaches in the synagogue there; He heals Peter's mother-in-law there in Peter's house. And we saw all the healings that went on last week in the passage in Capernaum on the afternoon of the Sabbath—we saw all of that. And now at the end of this text, as you can imagine, there is a high interest in having Jesus stick around in Capernaum. I mean, His authority in the pulpit was mesmerizing for these people, and the work that He was doing in the town to validate His claims as Messiah—I mean, they wanted Him to be, you know, the resident rabbi.

But He responds, if you look at this text, with a statement regarding His knowledge of what He's come to do, and He was not gonna let anything dissuade Him from doing that. Start in verse 42: "And when it was day"—you remember all the kinds of things that sick people had been brought to Him after the sundown on the Sabbath—"now it's Sunday, it's day, and He departed and He went into a desolate place. And when the people sought Him and came to Him"—and this important phrase here—"would have kept Him from leaving," as you would want Jesus to leave your town. "But He said to them, 'I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns as well.'" Now here's the key phrase—highlight this—"for I was sent for this purpose."

Now, if you're thinking about that—why was Jesus sent?—most of us would rush quickly to the cross. He came to die for us. The resurrection came to validate His acceptable sacrifice through the validation of the resurrection. But really here what we see in view is His assignment, His purpose that was given to Him: to preach the *euangelion*—that word that has been a theme throughout this series—the gospel, translated here, the good news of the kingdom. That message that our sins can be forgiven, that though we're guilty before our Creator, that can all be replaced with a complete innocent track record with the righteousness of God if we would put our trust in Christ—that good news of the kingdom needed to be preached not just in Capernaum, but all throughout the area in Galilee, and even down into Judea, which is eventually where He ends up. The last line there, verse 44, says, "And He was preaching in the synagogues of Judea," even down into Judea, where He started, where He was born in Bethlehem.

Now that is a statement of a clear sense of purpose, assignment, direction, and things that are trying to get in the way—people that are trying to get Him to do something else. He's recognizing His purpose. And He's got to say no to people, disappoint some people, to get on about the business that He has.



Now, in this passage, you read in verse 43: it's clearly to preach the gospel, the good news. Now the series started six weeks back with making a very clear point that the Bible has also given us that responsibility. But that may have worn off because we haven't revisited it since then. And we may think, as we learn about Christ as Judge and Christ as Deliverer and all these things, like that's the kind of message that just isn't going to go over well at my job; it's not going to work well in my neighborhood. And we maybe have tried to wiggle out of the responsibility.

I just want to remind you before you see this as some kind of exclusive calling on the life of Christ—and really, it's not your calling—or if it's our calling, it's certainly the pastor's calling, or the missionaries; he'll do it; I'll just put some money in the bag and maybe let those guys do it. If you want to get out of that responsibility, maybe we need to revisit the idea that this is something that Jesus expects from all of us—the privilege and responsibility of representing Him in the world. And we looked at things earlier in the series on the Great Commission, Matthew 28; we looked at our call to be ambassadors in Second Corinthians 5.

Let me take you to another place just to make this clear—to tie in the thought of Christ finishing His assignment and then passing that assignment down to us. Turn with me, if you would, to John 17. John, chapter 17. This is the prayer of Jesus, and Jesus has John record this prayer as He prays for us. But He starts with, at the end of His earthly ministry now, a statement about His completing the task. Now remember, Luke 4 is at the beginning of His public ministry; John 17, at the end—it's the week before He gets crucified, the Passion Week. So you have all these years in between—three and a half years or so—where He is preaching the gospel, from synagogue to synagogue, and on hillsides and everywhere else, on the Temple Mount and Solomon's colonnade—everywhere.

Now, He says here in His prayer—just jump into the middle of it in verse number 4, John 17:4—He says, praying to God the Father: “I glorified You on earth.” It's good. We'd like to think our lives glorified God. How did You do that? “Having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do.” Now, again, I'm trying to tie in the statement from Luke 4 to this one. He hasn't gone to the cross yet. He hasn't been resurrected yet. So the work that God called Him to do—though that's critically important to us—the one that's in view here, both in Luke 4 and in John 17, is His proclamation of the good news of the gospel, that people can be saved from the penalty of their sins. And He looks back at the last three and a half years; He says, I've done that. I've accomplished it.

Now, to put it in terms of what that is—I mean, as if we needed the clarification, we know it—but let's hear the words that Jesus used. Start in verse 2—go back up to verse 2: “Since You've given Him”—speaking of Himself here, the Son—“authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You've given Him.” So the whole point of this mission that He's accomplished is that He has saved people; He has had people come to repentance and faith in Him. “And this is eternal life,” to put it in the broadest terms, verse 3, “that they may know You, the only true God”—and the barrier between us and God, what sin problem, get that out of the way, trusting in Christ, the Lamb of God, though He's yet to go to the cross—“and to know the Father, to know the Son—Jesus



Christ whom You've sent." That picture of Him being the messenger of information that will put people in touch not only with God the Father, but in connection relationally with Him—that's His job. And He looks back and He says, I've accomplished it. I've done it. How good it must have felt at the end of His life—the week His life ends—to say, when it comes to the job of sharing the gospel, man, I did it. I accomplished the task. I did what God has called Me to do.

Now, to get a little more clarity on this—and I talked about Him passing this off—He does this even in the prayer. Drop down to verse 6. He said, "I manifested Your name to the people. And I gave that information to whom You gave Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me," these people, "and they've kept Your word." So these people got the information and they've kept it. Look at verse 8: "I've given them the words that You gave Me," the words You gave Me, Father, I've entrusted to them, "and they've received them and they've come to know in truth that I came from You." They understood this whole transaction of the Son of Man coming to earth, "and they believed that You sent Me." That's the key to being a follower of Christ.

Now, He says a lot of other things about unity and other things He wants to happen within this group of followers, but drop down to verse 17, all the way down to verse 17. He now says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world"—now think about this—you gave Him a message, this good news, and Christ has been sent in the world to proclaim that everywhere so that people would know God—"so I have sent them into the world." Look at that—the chain of the Father sending the Son with a message to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. He says, I've done it; I gave them the word; now set them apart, sanctify them in the word; now they can go out and do the same thing. Just like, Father, You sent Me—Jesus says—I've sent them.

You may still say, well, I don't see myself in that sentence. Great. Drop down to verse 20—here you come: "I do not ask for these only," not just this first generation of converts, He says, "but also for those who will believe in Me through their word." You need any other convincing that you and I are responsible to take the word and the message that have been given to us and to pass that on to other people? I know this may sound redundant, and if I've won you earlier in the series, fantastic—just call this reinforcement. But I gotta think there are many people who've sat through six weeks of this message series about us presenting Christ to our generation and saying, I'm just going to let someone else do that. I'm just not—I don't think I can. I don't—it's not my calling.

Number one on your outline, let's put it this way: you and I need to rethink our life's agenda. Rethink your life's agenda. You have a calling. And it is a calling that is so overarching in your life as a Christian that whatever you do and however you spend your hours every week, this has to be an integral part of that. You are an ambassador of Christ. You're called to make disciples. You're called to help people in your sphere of influence know God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. That is an agenda item that is to infiltrate all that you do.



“Well, I’m a mom; I’m raising kids. You know, I’m a dentist; I sell insurance; I work on spreadsheets all week—that’s what I do.” Listen, your agenda in life supersedes where you live out that agenda and what you do for a job and what your business card says. Yeah, you may be an architect; you may be a builder of homes; you may be whatever you are—school teacher. But the bottom line is when God called you to be His, He called you to take the message that saved you and pass that on to other people. And that was an agenda that Jesus said He understood, and He was going to do it. And He was going to make sure He went around making that happen. He knew His purpose—“for this purpose I was sent.” Now He said, everyone who’s become a Christian has been sent just like He was sent. There’s just no—there’s no wiggling out of that. You’ve tried; I’ve tried. There’s no wiggling out of this. We’ve got to share the message. It is the agenda God has given us.

I know one of the problems that we have when it comes to the issue of agendas, and that is that we often think of Christ as coming alongside of us to bless our agenda. I mean, that’s how Christ is presented in the 21st-century church so often, right? “Oh, He’ll get you out of hell; you get your ticket to heaven.” But He’s kind of coming alongside as, you know, kind of a life coach, right? You’ve just picked Him up in your life. And you may not think He’s like the hitchhiker that you’ve kind of picked up, but you know, you’ll even call Him your co-pilot. Have I bashed that bumper sticker enough over the years? “Christ is my co-pilot.” And what have I said? If you think Christ is your co-pilot, trust me, He never got in the car. He’s not in the cockpit at all. Because He doesn’t sign up to be your co-pilot. He is the Lord. And when you sign up to follow Christ, you sign up to follow Christ. That was profound. No, no—it’s very simple. He says, “Follow Me.” He’s got an agenda. And His agenda is He’ll send you into the world wherever He plants you, whatever you do for a living, to represent Him.

I mean, I could go on and on all morning just about the motifs and illustrations of this. We’re called to be salt. We’re called to be light. We’re called to be representatives. We’re called to be emissaries. We’re called to be ambassadors. We’re called to be messengers. I mean, look through the Bible and how often every follower of Christ is given the identity of being someone who reaches out his hand to other people and says, “Let me tell you about what it is to know God.” I mean, that is your identity, that is your agenda, that is your overarching task. You’ve got to look at your life, regardless of what you do, and say, How can I leverage this thing that I do, this place that I live, this environment in which I operate, this sphere of influence that I have—how can I leverage that to help people know the living God? That is the agenda item that reflects perfectly Christ’s agenda.

You may not like the word “preach,” you may not like the word, you know, “I don’t know—going into the places to speak like He did.” Fine. Whatever you want to call it, you are called to proclaim the message of the good news. I know that sounds so survival—it sounds so—I mean, we even started with professorial: you’ve got someone giving assignments and you dutifully do it like a dutiful pupil in a classroom. Let me help you—just jot this reference down if you’re note-taking: First John, chapter five, verse three. I want to help you with this. This is not just some, you know,



assignment that you do because it's obligatory. It moves beyond that, though it is that—I get that. First John 5:3—you don't even need to turn there; you probably know this passage. It puts everything in the context of what it is. And that is: when I relate to God, I'm responding to the fact that God loves me. And what He does in my heart is He generates in my heart a love for Him. And the Bible says, "This is the love of God"—you want to describe it?—He says, "that we keep His commandments." And if you know the rest of that verse, here it comes: "and His commandments are not a burden."

In a love relationship with the Father, when He sends me to do something, because I love Him, it's not like, "Here I go again—another assignment. Ah, homework—I hate that." This is something where, in the relationship that I have with God, it becomes less of a responsibility and more of a privilege. I'm happy to do this for the God who sent His Son for me. I'm happy to represent the Christ who willingly laid down His life so that I wouldn't be punished before God. That—that's a kind of responsiveness to a God who has done so much for us—that should make the commands of God a whole lot less of a burden. I hope that you know just doing things in your marriage for your spouse is not a burden to you if you love that person. And so we need to somehow recognize that though it is an obligation—and that's how we've framed this whole thing—it is certainly a privilege, to which I must approach as a wonderful expression of my own devotion to Christ.

Put it down this way, at least in your notes: First Corinthians chapter nine, verses 16 through 22. First Corinthians 9:16–22. That's where Paul says, you know, it is both a privilege and a responsibility. Here's what he says. He says, if I have the obligation to share the gospel with people—he says, you know what? If I do it just because it's obligatory—this is the Mike Fabarez paraphrase—if I do it just because it's obligatory, well then, fine. It's a stewardship, and I'm doing it, and that's what I'm at. But if I can do it voluntarily, if I can step up in my own heart and be happy to do this, oh, well then there's great reward. He distinguishes this: that I can either go, "This is an assignment; I just gotta suck it up and do it," or I can recognize the context in which this is taking place. God loves me; I love Him. This is a privilege. What great reward there is to do it voluntarily.

But the third option—which many of you have chosen—he says, is not an option. Here's that line from this passage: "But woe to me if I don't preach the gospel." Woe to me if I don't do it. Man, that would not be an option for me to disobey God in this regard. And again, I've got to appeal to you as your pastor—if you've been through this series and you've felt a little bit of that pressure—I get all the time the complaints: "I feel pressure." Hey, maybe it's not me. Maybe it's me presenting to you what God has to say about what your life should be. And when it comes to the gospel, that's your calling.

"Well, I'm not all that." Fine. We're not asking you to go on some platform in a stadium. We're just asking you to look at the sphere of influence in your life and say, Do they know I'm a Christian? Have I talked to them about what it means to be a Christian? Have I offered an opportunity to sit



down with them and explain to them what it means to follow Christ? I just need to be engaged in talking about this, because I've been entrusted with the same mission that Christ was: to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

And then I love how that ends—if you know that passage in First Corinthians 9, he goes on in the last three verses to talk about the fact that no matter where I'm at, I'm going to do it. If it's to the Jews—man, I'll adapt there, and I'll preach the gospel; I'll do what I can because I want to win some Jews. And if it's to the Greeks and they don't know the Jewish customs—fine, I'll put those all aside and I'll preach to the Greeks if I can win some Greeks. If it's the barbarians, to the lawless—fine, forget it; forget all the things of this and that—I'll go. But I want to preach Christ. And he ends this way: so that by all means—I'll be all things to all men so that by all means I might win some. There's a passion of someone who loves Christ enough to say, I'm here to obey Him and do it. And it's not a burden; it's a responsibility and an agenda item in my life that I'm happy to fulfill.

Rethink your life's agenda. Regardless of where you spend your 40 or 50 hours a week, just know that you're called to be light in that place representing the message of the gospel.

I started with the middle of this, and that's verse 43 in Luke 4—it's printed on your worksheet there where He clarifies, I know My purpose is to preach the gospel, which happens to be—and I've made this case elsewhere—it's your responsibility as well. It is your purpose and agenda as well. But in verse 42, I want to show you that to do this, He had to disappoint some people by saying, I know you want Me to do something else. In this regard, "We want You to stay here, be the resident doctor, and heal all of our sick people. And we'd like You to stick around here." And He said, I can't just do this one thing; I've got to do this thing because this is in keeping with My calling to share Christ.

Verse 42—look at it again: "When it was day, He departed and went to a desolate place. And the people sought Him, and they came to Him, and would have kept Him from leaving"—they tried. Literally, the Greek word's often translated "hinder." They wanted to hinder Him and keep Him from doing this. And He had to say, Sorry—can't do it.

See, this is what life is all about. When we start talking about priorities or life agendas, the problem is in your life you're going to have things that want to compete for that. You're gonna have things that are going to distract, to derail you. I've entitled this sermon "Staying on Task," because there are so many things in your life that are gonna try to get you off task. And the task is representing Christ in a lost world.



Now, here's the thing about being challenged with our priorities: rarely is it a decision, as I often say, between good and bad. Have you noticed that? It's not like, "Hey, do you want to go, I don't know, mug an old lady this afternoon, or share Christ with somebody today?" Those aren't the options I'm often faced with. The questions are not between good and bad. The decisions are not between something that's really a great thing to do and a bad thing to do. It's usually between better and best. This is a good thing—matter of fact, it's a better thing than most things. But here's the best thing. And those competing interests—do you think it was bad for Jesus to stay in town and keep on helping people? Not a bad thing at all. They didn't say, "Hey, You want to join a street gang here in Capernaum?" No. "Do You want to stay here, keep teaching in our synagogues? You want to keep helping the people that are sick here? Would You like to do that?" That's a good thing. But I'm going to say no to a good thing because I need to do the best thing.

How does that work in our lives? Well, I guess I'd have to ask, what hindrances or distractions are there in your life that are squeezing out your evangelism, that are keeping you from speaking up about Christ? Put it this way, number two: you need to be aware of those things. Be aware of life's distractions. Life's distractions—the good thing that you're called to do Monday through Friday—may become a distraction that squeezes out your opportunity to share the gospel. Did you catch that? It is a good thing for you to be a great employee—be a great employee. But being a great employee may become so overwhelming in your life that it keeps you from ever really opening up your mouth and talking about Christ. Being a good parent—moms—going to be great; I'm going to go to every Little League game I can—I get that. But you see, maybe in being a good mom what you've done is become a lousy evangelist, and you've not really been active in sharing the gospel with people in your life.

See, there's a lot of things that compete for our interest that are good things. And all I'm telling you is we need to do what Jesus told us to do, and that is Matthew 6:33—seek first the kingdom. And the point there isn't between doing bad things and good things; it's between doing really good things, better things, and best things. In other words, He says, you know what? God knows you need to eat. God knows you need an income. God knows you need a job. The problem is the pagans are so laser-focused on that, they really don't put the kingdom agenda first. They can never get the right things at the top of the list—it's always the good things. He says they chase after all those things, and the Lord knows you need them, but you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"Well, see, if I don't put all my attention in work, you know, I don't know—I could lose my job." The promise of God is this: that if you include in your agenda that your sphere of influence is to somehow represent Christ in that industry, in that office, in that sphere of influence, and you recognize that—and maybe say no to some new client, or no to some advanced promotion, or you don't climb the corporate ladder the way they tell you to, because you're trying to do other things with your life—the Bible says God will take care of you. He promises to take care of you. If you miss a few soccer games because you're building relationships with a neighbor so that you can lead that gal to Christ, and you know what, mom, maybe you missing a few soccer games isn't the end of the world. Maybe in reality what you see as something less than a perfect mom or a perfect



employee really becomes something that's a win in heaven. You understand what I'm saying? That you now become someone who is not so tied up in other things that you're distracted from doing the main thing God's called you to do.

To put it simply, if you're too busy to share the gospel with people, you're too busy. Period. You're too busy. If you're too absorbed in whatever you do all week long to ever sit down and talk with someone about what it means to have forgiveness of sins through Christ, then maybe you're too absorbed in things. There's no "maybe" about it. Let me revise that: you are too absorbed in things. If you're a Christian, you're called to proclaim the gospel. It doesn't mean you have to strap on a microphone and stand behind a pulpit, but it does mean that you have to see, as your life agenda, a representation and an ambassadorship that you present to a world, and you cannot be distracted in that. Why? Because the Bible says one day we will be evaluated.

Now again, I want to do this because I love God. But if for some reason that doesn't motivate me to move it up, here's something the Bible constantly provides us, and that is a motivation that one day our lives will be graded. I've got to turn you to this passage—as uncomfortable as it is—First Corinthians chapter 3. First Corinthians chapter 3. I want you to recognize, as you think about your evangelistic call—as awkward as that may seem to some of you—your desire to please God must include this, because if it becomes something that gets squeezed out of your life, one day as you answer to God you're not going to be happy about that outcome.

Here's how it's put in this passage. Now I understand the context here. First Corinthians chapter 3 is about the church and how people are coming and investing in church in terms of leadership and teaching. But the principles clearly apply across the board. Verse 12—if you glance through the first few verses there, you'll see we're talking about Christ being the foundation—verses 9, 10, 11. Then he says, "Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw"—which of course they will, all different kinds of material—this analogy says, well then "each one's work will become manifest"—apparent; it will be clearly displayed for what it is—"for the Day"—I love the way the translators do this, "Day" with a capital D, right? Because no adjective to describe what we're talking about, but the context makes it very clear: the Day. I don't know if you think about the Day enough, but there will be a Day when the reality of your Christianity will not only be "Are you a Christian or are you not a Christian?" but "What kind of Christian were you?" And when it comes to the main identity that you have as an ambassador of Christ, there's going to be disclosure of how you did at that. And the analogy here with wood, hay, straw; gold, silver, precious stones—is disclosed in this analogy with fire, verse 13—"because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done."

"For if the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives"—and only would if it were gold, silver, and precious stones—"he will receive a reward." Have I said this enough to you? For those of you that say, "I don't care about rewards; I don't care; I just..."—you know, rewards... Rewards will matter. Rewards do matter to you. It's funny how when your colleague gets a raise and you



don't, you seem to care about rewards now. "Well, I won't care about rewards then—it's just a bunch of golden harps and crowns, and I don't play harp and I don't look good in a crown, and I'm not interested in all that." If that's what you think the rewards are all about, you don't understand what the Bible has to say about the very real, tangible rewards God gives those who are faithful to do the assignments. Listen, if you don't think you'll care about the rewards, ask me in 100 years. Talk to me about it then. Your perspective will change. Because what will matter is God giving rewards to people that really will enjoy what those rewards are all about. What are they all about? It's hard to explain. I don't know—I don't have all the details. But God is really good at giving rewards—the kind of rewards that no one's going to turn their nose up at. So I'd like those. And if I do the work the way I'm supposed to, I'll get that.

"But if anyone's work is burned up," verse 15, "he will"—here's a word we don't like to think of after our death—"suffer loss." I thought heaven was gonna be happiness and no tears and all that. Here's the deal: the Bible makes it clear—on the day of our evaluation there's going to be some suffering of loss. "Though he himself will be saved"—I'm not saying he's cast into hell; there's no purgatory in this passage—but it's a kind of loss, because in this analogy the fire revealed their life was really built with stuff like gold, silver, precious stones—no, a lot less of that. There was a lot more wood, hay, and straw.

Now, in the larger context, that's what you need to see in this passage, is that everyone thinks wood, hay, and straw now is the great stuff to build with, and everyone's going to clap when you invest in those things. Don't miss this point. Now drop down to the bottom of this passage—start in verse 18—where he says, just a few verses down: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool" because what people really love now is that you invest your life in things like wood, hay, and straw, because the world claps at those; those are the right things to invest with. They prefer you keep quiet about Christianity and other things that would advance the cause of Christ. The things that God would value as gold, silver, and precious stones—here's the suggestion from God: well, why don't you become a fool, because that'd be a good thing. They'll call you "fool"—whatever—they'd say whatever they want to say about you, but you'll become wise in that moment and in those actions. "For the wisdom of this world is folly with God." He's not real impressed with the wisdom of the world. For as it is written—now he quotes two passages—"He catches the wise in their craftiness"—He often exposes the fact that that was really dumb, verse 20—and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise"—quote-unquote "wise"—"that they are futile."

And here's the thing: most of us are too busy taking cues from the culture and our world to really look at what the Bible calls us to do in life. And it leads us to the kinds of distractions of buying a lot of wood, hay, and straw. And we end up building our lives with that. Then one day, all of that will be exposed. And we need to be careful that we recognize that in that moment, we're not going to be happy about the priorities that never made it to the top of our list.



Now, I can talk about external things that hinder us because that's the passage—I mean, at least in the passage in Christ's life, people were saying, "Please, please stay here," and He said, "No, I can't do that, because I need to do this good thing—say no to the good thing for the best thing." But a lot of the hindrances that we have when we think about proclaiming the good news of the kingdom isn't external pressure; it's internal pressure. It's internal distractions. It's internal hindrances. Am I right? I mean, most people in this room that do not talk to people about Jesus Christ—it isn't that people are physically pressuring you or telling you "don't"; it's because you don't do it, because inside you're inhibited. You feel inadequate. You feel like you don't know enough. You feel like, "I'm just not very good at talking, and I really can't do it."

And listen, that may sound like something in your own head that is very excusable. Matter of fact, some people think it's humility; and humility is so godly and virtuous, and you feel fine about making those excuses. When you think that way, be sure to remember Exodus chapter 4. When God speaks to Moses, and Moses—when he's been told now to go and speak to Pharaoh and fix things there and bring the children of Israel out into the wilderness—Moses gives Him the humble excuse: "I'm not very good at that. I've never been an eloquent speaker. You know, I know—I'm no preacher." He has that whole thing. And it's really one of the few times we see God in the Bible—I mean, we see it from time to time—but He looks at one of His choice, honored servants, and—he becomes one of the most important figures in the Bible—and it says, this angered the LORD. The LORD became angry. You may say, what a humble guy—this is not a humility that God cherishes; it's nothing He's going to be happy with in our lives. He gets mad at him. You remember the argument that went on there, when he says—here's a little line from Moses—"Send someone else." "Why don't You send..." It's never a good idea to tell God, even when He's saying, "I need you to go," to send somebody else. We need the mindset of Isaiah 6—remember that one? "Here am I; send me." I'll go. There's a willingness there. It's like Jeremiah—he was persuaded to go a little quicker than Moses was, and he had the same excuse: "I'm inexperienced; I'm young; I don't know that I'm very good at speaking." And God says, "Then you need to speak up." And Jeremiah was convinced.

Moses here is struggling, and much like with Jeremiah, God says to Moses, "Who made the mouth?" I just want you to start flapping your mouth for Me—talk. And he says, "I'm not very good at talking." "I need you to speak up. Who made the mouth?" "Oh—you did." "Okay. Now, if I made the mouth," here's the argument, "can't I enable it to work in the way I want it to?" I just need you to be willing to open your mouth, speak, talk—do what I'm asking you to do.

Some of us struggle with that inhibition, timidity, fear—this false humility of "I just can't do it." All I'm telling you is, whatever the excuses, realize it's a lame excuse, because God says there's nothing that should keep us from fulfilling this purpose.

Now, I know when you look at Christ at the end of His ministry there in John 17, you'd say, "Well, of course He kept it—He's Jesus, He's God. He doesn't make mistakes. He keeps all the



assignments, and He does them, and He gets A-pluses on everything.” Well, even people that are not, right, God incarnate in the Bible show us that you can go through your life, as imperfect as you live it, and look back on it at the end of your life and have an expectation that you’re going to hear from Christ, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

I think of the Apostle Paul at the end of his life in Second Timothy chapter 4. He sits there and writes to the young Timothy—who, by the way, was struggling with timidity and being ashamed, and he keeps bolstering him to be strong and courageous—and he says, “You know what? I’m at the end of my life now.” I’m quoting now from Second Timothy 4. He says, “I’m ready to be poured out like a drink offering.” He said, “But here’s the good news: I’ve kept the faith; I’ve fought the good fight; I’ve finished the course.” Think about that. I just wonder—just to think about it in your own life—if you get to the end of your life and look back, how confident would you like to be then, when it comes to the major agenda items of your life like speaking up for Christ? Would you like to look back and feel like, “I did it—at work, did it; neighborhood, did it; extended family, did it. I spoke up. I finished the course. I did the work.”

In pastoral ministry—obviously, we’re dealing with death all the time—and yesterday I was talking to a man who’s been sent home from the hospital—great brother in Christ here in our church—and they’ve done all they can do. His cancer’s out of control and a lot of complications, so they’ve sent him home to die. They say you’ve got about a week left to live. So I get on the phone with him yesterday, and I call him: “Pastor Mike.” And of course he sounds weak, and he’s dying. And we just sat there on the phone and he reminisced about his life. You know, I don’t know—he may die this afternoon—maybe the last time I ever talk to him, but there was that kind of reflection on his life and that thought about his life. And you can’t help but talk to a dying man knowing he’s got very little time left and not think of your own life. And here he is in hospice, ready to go, and I’m thinking about, you know, the day I’m in hospice, or when I’m on a gurney in a hospital, if I don’t die in some tragic accident by surprise, and I know it’s coming—I think, how confident will I be able to be like this guy I talked to yesterday? You know, that sense of, I’m ready, I’ve done my job. I’ve done what God called me to do.

You don’t have to be the Apostle Paul, and you don’t have to be Jesus Christ to be able to say, I did it. But it’s going to matter what you do today, this week, next month, this year. There’s an old adage we say a lot around our house: “As now, so then.” A lot of people think, I’ll get to it later; I’ll do that later; I’ll start doing those kinds of things down the road in the next season of life. That’s a good principle to remember: if you’re not willing now to get involved in these things, I don’t think any magic’s going to happen in your life down the road. God has put you right now at a place where you’ve got to make decisions: Am I going to speak up for Christ in my sphere of influence or not?

Be aware of life’s distractions. As Jonathan Edwards said in his Resolutions, we need to think often of our day of our dying. That maybe helps us to recognize there will be a day when the bell rings and we’ve got no more time to work on the things that God asked us to work on. Today would be a



good day; this week could be a good week to purposefully get involved in fulfilling our duty as representatives of Christ, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

One last verse in the chapter—Luke 4:44. In my study of this passage, I’m contemplating and meditating on this line—it’s so simple. For one, it was interesting because if you look at the parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels, you’ll see Matthew and Mark talk about Him preaching in the synagogues and around Galilee, or in the region of Galilee. Luke 4, though—verse 44—speaks of Him preaching in the synagogues of Judea. And it’s just like Luke, the meticulous historian, to talk in these terms, I think. Because if you know your geography, of course, Galilee is up there where Capernaum is and where Nazareth is around the Sea of Galilee. Well, Judea is down south where Jerusalem and Bethlehem are. And here I thought to myself, as I contemplated the contrast between the way Mark and Matthew said it and the way that Luke said it and described this, is that Luke went even further—which is, of course, true—He did go around in the synagogues of Galilee, but He made His way all the way down into the Judean ministry, all in the synagogues down there. And I thought to myself, well, man, even that is the longest view he could have in mind. And how did that happen? By stepping outside the city limits of Capernaum and starting to walk on to the next town. The way I thought about it is: Jesus fulfilled His purpose one synagogue at a time. He kept moving—He had to start it. You think about that old adage—you’ve heard the adage, “The longest journey begins with a single step,” remember that? Well, Jesus was willing to say, I’m on to do what I’ve been called to do. I’ve done it here; I’m going to move on. He made progress.

Number three on your outline, just as we wrap up—not only this sermon, but the whole series on presenting Christ—I just want to make sure you’re making progress. Be sure you’re making some progress. Some of you—maybe it’s been such a, you know, concerning and petrifying series that you think, I am picturing someone you’re talking about, and I cannot see myself doing that at all. I know people that do that; they talk naturally about Christ; they’re always yakking it up about Jesus. I can’t see myself doing that. Great. You need to see what you’re seeing. But instead of seeing that you’re going to jump into this, maybe let’s just start by taking the first step. I mean, let’s just make progress. Jesus went to one synagogue—He had to leave Capernaum on His road to the next synagogue to do what God had called Him to do.

We have four quick sub-points here.

A. And this is kind of how our series started—this is a different list with a little bit of overlap—but if we’re going to be involved in what God has asked us to do, maybe you’re thinking, “I can’t see myself sharing the gospel this afternoon at lunch.” Fine. Can we start with this? Can you just identify the people in your life that need Christ? List people who need Christ by name. List them—put them on a list, write it down, put them in your iPad, put it on a Word doc, jot it down on a yellow tablet. Who do I know in my life, in my sphere of influence—the people I run into on a weekly basis—who do I know that needs to submit their lives to Jesus Christ? Just list those. Just that act right there begins to provide some clarity as to who it is that God might have me be the



messenger to. And by the way, in that list you may look at some of those names and say, “Well, you know, I really don’t even know that person very well; I just know that they’re not a Christian.” And listen, that’s the beginning—it’s about building some of those bridges, isn’t it? It’s about the relationship. Some of you—you’ve invested in only Christian relationships. You need to say, Okay, here are some people on this list. God, I need to start at least having conversations about things other than work or business or the weather. I need to start building a bridge here.

B. I’ve talked about prayer before, because you really can’t talk about evangelism without it. But let me put it this way: pray for their salvation. And I mean that very specifically—pray that they will get saved. And by that I mean, pray that they will put their trust in Christ; pray that they will have their sins forgiven. Pray for the ultimate thing we’re asking for as evangelists. The thing that we want to see happen is, I want to see their life converted. Pray for that. That’s the thing that we want to have dominate our prayers as we pray for lost people. And Paul, you know, he modeled that in Romans 9, Romans 10—it was so clear to him that he wanted to see them saved. That does for us some things that we’ve been talking about throughout this series. Number one, it will start to generate the compassion in our hearts for those people—people I pray for. When I just pray specifically, “God, I want them to be saved,” that statement alone in my prayer life starts to create that concern, that mercy in my heart, that compassion to see them saved. It also starts to bolster our courage, does it not? When I keep praying every day for that, it’ll start to give you that sense of courage to step up and be the tool that God might use to do that.

C. Thirdly, one of the reasons I’m concerned about some of you opening your mouth about the gospel is I’m afraid what might come out. I need you all to make sure you have literacy—master the gospel message. Master the gospel message. Make sure you know what we’re talking about. The Christian world, in this regard, has a lot of trite little sayings and cliches and platitudes. We need to get past those things to the meat of what the gospel is. What is it that Christ wants us to share with the lost world? Is it just a bunch of niceties? Is it just “Jesus loves you” and “have a nice day”? Much more than that. But it’s not as complicated as having to, you know, express some volume of a systematic theology. But there is something to it. And we’ve talked about it in a lot of different messages, with the ideas of God being—as we did in this series—the Judge, and because He’s Creator, because He’s holy, it puts us as sinful people in trouble with that Judge. And yet His love has created this perfect solution to our problem in the mercy of God in Christ. I mean, we need to have that in our heads; we need to clearly master that message.

And one of the best ways that the church, by the way—here at Compass—to do that is for you to go through our one-on-one discipleship program. If you haven’t been through that, what a great tool for you to sit down one-on-one with someone and start at the beginning, which gets you thinking through your own testimony and how God came to reach you. And we move on to the attributes of God and how to get accurate information from our Bible study and our prayer lives, and it ends up in chapter nine, which is the second-to-last chapter, saying, “Can I clearly communicate the gospel message? How do I do that?” If you’ve never been through the Partners program, I highly, highly recommend you do that. And you may have passed by the Partners table out on the patio a hundred times—stop there and just say, “Man, I’d like to sign up for this.” If you’re a skeptic, just flip

through the material—they have a Partner workbook there—just flip through it and check it out. It’s something very basic in terms of its system: you read, you study, you look things up, you write them down, you meet once a week, and you get together one-on-one. “I have a really weird schedule.” Fine—we’ll meet you at two in the morning if you want. We’ll find someone crazy enough with your schedule to match you up so you can sit there with them at 7-11 at two in the morning by the Slurpee machine and work through the Partners. And some of you have been through it, but it’s a little foggy in your mind, and we’re not talking about you just pitching canned presentations—although the canned presentations may help us be able to have so mastered the material that you can then adapt and improvise and be able to share it in a million different ways. If you just want review on that, that website that we have up—it’s called sharetheumbrella.com—sharetheumbrella.com—which is basically chapter nine’s final, you know, output of the basics of the gospel presentation. I’ve got to make sure I understand something about substitution of Christ on the cross, about the resurrection and its role, about God being Creator, holy, just, loving—all of that. The primer on that—sharetheumbrella.com—which we need to turn into an app would be great; we need to do that. Someone do that. I should probably do that at a staff meeting, but this is our larger staff, so—anyway. Master the message.

D. Lastly, number four: this is really two—I should have said there are five things because there’s two parts to this. Ask for opportunities. Ask for opportunities. I say there’s two parts to this because there are two people to ask. First person to ask is God. And in that regard, you can word it this way: you need to pray for opportunities. Now, I did say this specifically in the very first session of our series—we talked about the role of the Holy Spirit. He orchestrates situations, and so you need to pray that He would open up—well, I’m just saying it again. And I dare you—didn’t I dare you on the first week? I dare you just to pray this every day. Every morning, whatever you do in the morning—read the Bible, pray to God—make the last prayer before you put on your shoes and walk out the door—make the last prayer, “God, give me an opportunity to talk to someone about Christ today.” More than just “Jesus loves you” and “have a nice day,” but about the gospel. You’ve mastered the message; now pray for opportunities. I dare you to pray that prayer today.

Secondly, though, ask for opportunities from the people on your list. Look at your list. God will burden you with some people on that list that don’t know Christ. And just ask them the simple question—here it comes—so simple, so easy. Here it is: “Can I share with you what the Bible has to say about having your sins forgiven?” Boom. That’s all you’ve got to ask. “Can I share with you what the Bible has to say about getting your sins forgiven?” It’s very simple. All of us deal with the issue of guilt at some point—in our own conscience we deal with that. Let’s just ask if we can talk about that. And if you’ve mastered the message, whether you do it through a system or whether you just sit there, because it’s so ingrained in your thinking, you adapt, you improvise, you share the message of what it means to put our trust in Christ and repent of our sins.

Don’t ask my boys about their homework—I get to chitchatting in algebra every night. “What’s wrong with you? You’re not into this?” And they say, “Well, Dad, were you into that when you were...” “Okay, well, you’re right.” I get it. I get why you’re not into it, and I get why I wasn’t into it when I was in your shoes. And I get why sometimes we look at evangelism and you think you’re



not into this as an assignment from—listen. The reason is the kids don't have that view that's long enough to connect what they really want with doing their homework. Right? As a parent, you're trying to get them to see it—even if they don't see it, at least to do it. Whether you do it voluntarily or you do it under obligation and compulsion, you've got to do your homework because there are effects and ramifications: do your homework, do your homework; get a good grade, get a good grade; get a good resume, get a good resume; get a good job, get a good job; you actually get money to get out of our house and rent, buy your own food, and pay your own, you know, green fee money—and it'll be great—go. And the better you do in school—there are connections to your life—and the better you do in life. I mean, not always, but 90% of the time. So we want you to do your homework.

Now, very few kids get that: "Oh, I'm going to do my homework tonight because I'm going to earn green fee money." Nobody—they don't think that way. But here's the thing: I get the fact that when you get those grades, there's really no immediate, real tangible gratification. But the thing about evangelism and the assignment God gives us to represent Christ in this world—though there is a then-and-there reward, kind of like homework and the payoff down the road—I get that. And I don't know what the reward will be, and I don't know what it's like, but you're going to really like it. So this will be good. But there's something much more now about the reward of evangelism. You engage in the assignment this week—as I've tried to dare you to do—you get engaged in doing what God has asked you to do, you will get the reward not only then; you'll get the reward now—a different part of the reward.

And I quoted this earlier in the series, but you do remember there in John 4, when Jesus was sharing with the woman at the well—the woman at the well goes into town; she gets all these people in Sychar riled up about the Messiah. And then they come back, and now Jesus is talking with His disciples about what it means to engage in the harvest. And as they're walking back in eager anticipation to learn about the Messiah that this lady had told them about, He's trying to explain how important it is. Here's what He says: He says, "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white unto harvest"—they're ready to go. And then here's the word, and it's the key word in this verse: "Already," verse 36—"already the one who reaps is receiving wages." Now think about that. "Already"—that means right now—the one who reaps—who was reaping at that moment that He said that? The only person at that point was the woman at the well, who was bringing these people back—"is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life." So there's something then-and-there, and there's something here-and-now. And then He says, why don't you guys get involved? Get together, get involved in this so that the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together.

Now, I said this at the outset six weeks ago, but some of you have never led someone to Christ. You've never had the experience of what it means to bring someone into the kingdom. There's a kind of profound joy in that; there's a kind of rejoicing in that kind of profound wage that can't be rivaled with anything else. That's a kind of here-and-now payoff for keeping the assignment. Even sometimes—I might say, as perverse and weird as it sounds—even sometimes when we don't get a good response from the gospel, we go away thinking, Man, it felt good to do what God has asked



me to do. I encourage you to do that because the rewards for doing the assignment are incomparable, and they're not only then-and-there; they're here-and-now.

I'm gonna end with a word of prayer. We're at the end of our time. Would you stand with me? And as we pray, I want to pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 9. Speaking of His discussions of the harvest on a different occasion, He told His disciples in Matthew 9—He says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." So there's a lot of people to be reached; unfortunately, those Christians are sitting on their hands, and they're distracted, and they've got a lot of hindrances, and they just make excuses, and I can't get them in the harvest field. So His solution was: pray. Remember that? Matter of fact, the old translations used to translate that "beseech," which you haven't used in a sentence this week, probably. So they've dropped that, and the ESV now calls it two words: "pray earnestly," because there are Greek words for prayer. And this is not the normal Greek word for prayer—this is the Greek word for begging. Beg—earnestly pray—to the Lord of the harvest; He's in charge of the harvest, that He would—and I've often explained this verb—thrust forth, to send forth—the strongest word for just shoot them out into the field—to send forth workers into the harvest.

That's my prayer for you, and I want to close that way. Now, I know it would make a huge difference in South Orange County if I could just get half of us to take this series seriously.

Let's pray.

God, You called us to be doers of the word, not hearers only. It's a very simple assignment—as scary as it may be to many people in this room right now—the assignment of speaking up for You in this world. It's not just a missionary's job. It's not the pastor's job alone. It's just not the job of the apostles or Christ. The mission for us to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God is ours, and we need to do it.

And God, I pray that today, as simple as that is, that we'd have very few people that fold their arms and just refuse. God, if we're stiff-necked about this, as the Bible says, if we're hard-hearted, if we're callous about it, just break that down—break through all that. Please give us that willingness—as scared as we may be, as Moses was—let us open our mouths and see what You'll do. Some people here need to be careful before they open their mouth to really master the message. So I do pray for that step—a lot of people to be involved in discipleship, to even just examine the elements of the gospel in a way that can be discussed in an intelligent, cogent way.



So I pray for that study that needs to take place. But God, I ask that You thrust forth some workers into the harvest—that thousands of people go to this church; thousands of people will hear this message—and if I could just have 75% of them move into an increasing discussion in their sphere of influence about You, I think there would be a palpable impact on our society down here. Offices would be changed, and literally parents' group meetings would be changed, and neighborhoods and cul-de-sacs would be changed. And God, we want that. We know the Bible's been very clear about the fact that the only thing holding back the return of Christ is finishing the task of evangelism. So help us to have the boldness and courage and faith in You to step out and speak up.

God, obviously we're not jamming this down people's throats. There's a lot of people who don't want to hear—we'll move on from them. But we need to find those receptive hearts, as we've said in the series, and speak to them about what it means to have our sins forgiven, have Christ become our King, and to see a kind of relational knowledge and intimacy with Christ that we are made for.

So God, do this, I pray, and make a difference in this society because of it. And God, may You lavish this congregation with rewards for this—not because we're doing it for that reason; I get the crassness to that thought—but God, You promise to reward, and I pray that You would. As their pastor, I just pray that You'd give them great affirmation not only then-and-there—although it's going to be great; I can only imagine—but here-and-now. Give us that real sense that we're doing the work You've called us to do as we open up our mouths this week about Christ.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.